



'sun-treader'. This is a youthful poem of budding artist marked with a note of youthful exuberance. It is "young in its unclouded idealism, young in its egotism." Browning the artist and the thinker is here 'veiled in embryo. Browning's all engrossing interest in the study of a soul is faintly suggested in this work. The influence of Keats and Shelley broods over its form and texture. *Paracelsus* (1835) is like *Pauline* the history of a soul. In this momental work, Browning takes for his study Paracelsus a great scholar and physician of the Renaissance period. He had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and amassed a vast store of knowledge by his travels through the towns of Germany, France, Italy, Bohemia and Sweden. Paracelsus could not experience any joy of life in spite of his rich store of knowledge. He was guided by Aprile on the right course of life, and it was suggested to him by his beloved that knowledge alone was not sufficient to make a man happy in life. Knowledge ought to be combined with love, and then alone one could get real satisfaction and joy in life when he had almost completed the journey of his life. Knowledge without love is a failure. "In this poem Browning has worked out the idea on the basis of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. The thesis is the claim of knowledge to conquer everything, the synthesis is reconciliation of knowledge and love leading to the perfection of man."

In this philosophical work, splendid in its grandeur of design and depth of form, rich in its intellectual and ethical significance, all Browning's wonderful endowments are clearly suggested. We have in *Paracelsus* Browning's knowledge of the causes of spiritual growth and decay, subtle analysis of motive and counter motive, his eloquence in pleading a cause, the enkindled power and beauty of his language when blown upon by noble passion." The style of the poem is diffuse. The blank verse contains some passages of beauty. Some charming lyrics bedeck the philosophic poem.

In 1840 Browning produced the most controversial and obscure work of his life namely 'Sordello'. In dedication he wrote, "The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires, and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul, little else is worth study." Here Browning sought to decide the relationship between art and life. The work centres round Sordello, a Mantuan troubadour and is rich in historical allusions and archaeological references.



We are crammed by the Wealth of Learning which defied the intelligence of the scholars of the times. The references were obscure and unknown. Naturally the work failed to attract attention and was considered. "A derelict in the ocean of poetry." Tennyson's criticism of this work is well-known. He complained that he only understood two lines of the poem—the first "who will may hear Sordello's story told" and the last "who would has heard Sordello story told" and that they were both lies. The criticism appeared to be just for it is difficult to understand the poet's thought and references interspersed throughout the work. As a poem Sordello is a failure. It is notoriously difficult. The style is too compact and succinct.

*'Brevis and laboro obscurus fio*, as Horace said regarding his style. In spite of the failure of the work we should not shut our eyes to its beauties. "There is an immense amount of fundamental brain work in the poem" says Compton Rickett, "indeed it has become a derelict because overweighted with ballast". Here are some striking pen-pictures against an Italian background. "Through the compressed, elliptical style shine ever and again, as through the imperfect medium of an early, spotty film, vivid touches of description—scenery and interiors, the landscape of northern Italy and her towers with the turbulent life of the streets in peace and war, as well as individual figures". Some of the characters, Salingueira and Palma are dramatically drawn. Only the hero is a shadowy figure. "Whatever its faults as a poem" observes Grierson-Smith, "Sordello is of interest biographically in so far as it reflects the state of Browning's mind in the years when he had outgrown his mother's simple creed, and was seeking for sometime that would give him back faith and hope and love, provide an object for the superabundant energy which urged him on, like the hero of Pauline to "be all, have, see, know, taste, feel all" and help him to turn from the self-centred strivings of adolescence to a nobler life of service, as Sordello turns from Palma to the beggar maid." These early works of Browning concentrate on the life of the Renaissance, with its restless quest for knowledge and power. Here we find a close analogy with Marlowe's Faustus seeking for knowledge. Tamburlaine's line "still climbing after knowledge infinite" can equally well apply to Paracelsus and Sordello. *Dramatic Lyrics and Dramatic Romances (1836-46)*. In the earlier works of his life Browning was essentially a thinker and a moralist. The artist was outpaced by the philosopher and the moralist.



Now in the coming ten years (1836-1846) the artist came to the forefront and the work of this period marks the triumph of art. A number of dramatic lyrics and romances were produced by Browning which exhibit every side of his genius. In 1842 *Dramatic Lyric* were produced, and 1845 followed *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. In *Dramatic Lyrics* Browning comes out as a poet rich in every conceivable way. Here we feel God's plenty. Lyrics and Lyrics monologues abound, with a dramatic turn and picturesque setting. Among the lyrics of this volume the most significant are *Evelyn Hope*, *In a Gondola*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *Meeting at Night*, *Parting at Morning*, *Any Wife to any Husband*, *By the Fireside*, *Home Thoughts from Abroad*. *Evelyn Hope* impresses us by its tenderness, *In a Gondola* by its passion; *Porphyria's Lover* by its subtlety; *My Last Duchess* by its intellectual brilliance; *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* by its realism, humour, satire and keen observation of life; *By the Fireside* by its domestic felicity and *Home Thoughts from Abroad* by its patriotic fervour.

In *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845) the majority of the poems are narratives or monologues including such well-known poems as *My Last Duchess*, *The Italian in England*, *The Last Ride Together*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, *The Heretic's Tragedy*, *The Statue and the Bust*, *Holy-Cross Day*. The method in these poems is the same and the treatment exhibits a ripening of powers and greater accomplishment and ease.

### Men and Women (1855)

*Men and Women* which followed close on *Christmas Eve and Easterday*—poem of deep religious intensity—contains only dramatic monologues, mainly in blank verse. The best of these monologues are *Pictor Ignotus*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*, *Andrea Del Sarto* and the closing *One World More*. These poems were dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the voice of dedication is heard in the following lines explaining the significance of the work :

These they are my fifty men and women  
 Naming we the fifty poem finished  
 Take them, Love the book and me together  
 Where the heart lies let the brain lie also.



There is more emphasis in this volume than in its predecessors on the ironics of life. The splendour of passion, the benison of sympathy, the stimulus of a courageous front in life, these have been illustrated fully as well before, but now for the first time we see Browning dealing with the shallows and shoals of human nature".

Various causes may be assigned for the popularity of *Men and Women*. The poet was in the full maturity and vigour of his powers, and the method he adopted was that which suited his genius. Moreover, he is here less difficult to understand, less crabbed and eccentric than he too frequently is. The quality therefore is very high, and the average level is perhaps more uniformly sustained than it is any where else". (Hugh Walker).

### **Dramatis Personae (1864)**

In this volume of *Dramatis Personae* Browning carries on further with those studies of Men and Women that he has earlier begun in *Dramatic Lyrics*. The volume contains many dramatic monologues and the entire work is renowned for strenuousness of thought and splendour of conception. The strong human appeal of the earlier volume is less conspicuous. The lyric sweetness suffers. The intellectual side is more apparent. The elemental side of love proves less attractive. In style the poems have much of the rugged elliptical quality of the earlier Monologues. The main poems of this volume are *Caliban upon Setebos*, *Bishop Blonogram*, *Aft Vagles* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *A Death in the Desert*.

### **The Ring and the Book (1863-69).**

It is the crowning effort of his genius, and wins our admiration and wonder by the vastness of its scope and its grasp of human nature. It is a story of the murder of a young wife, Pompilia, by her worthless husband, and Browning covers more than 20,000 lines of blank verse in describing the tragedy by nine different persons from different angles in twelve books. The *Ring and the Book*, then, is a group of dramatic monologues closely bound together. All the speakers have been concerned in the same events, and they throw light upon one another. It is usually said that Browning tells the same story over and over again. "This" says Brock Kington in *Browning and the Twentieth Century*, "is not quite true because in each of the Dramatic monologues the events are looked at from a different angle, and



in each case emphasis is laid on one part or other—never the same part.” The count, the young wife, the suspected priest, the lawyer, the Pope who presides at the trial—each tells the story and each unconsciously reveals the depth of his nature in the recital. The most interesting of the characters are Guido, the husband, who changes from both defiance to abject fears Caponsauchi, the young priest, who aids the wife in her flight from her brutal husband, and is unjustly accused of false motives, Pompilia, the young wife, one of the noblest characters in literature in all respects to rank with Shakespeare’s great heroines; and the Pope, a splendid figure, the strongest Browning’s masculine characters.” (W.J. Long). The work is on the whole prolix and diffuse and is a monument of masterly discursiveness. Henry James liked the work for in his opinion the book contained the frame work of a good novel.

### Later works.

The later works of Browning are obscure. He added numerous further volumes of verse. *Balanstion’s Adventure* (1871) *Prince Hohenstiel Schwangan Saviour of Society*, (1871) *Fitfine at the fair* (1872) *Red Colton Night-Cap Country* (1873) *The Inn Album* (1875) *To Goseria* (1883) *Feristah’s Fancies* (1884) “All these works” says Albert, “suffer from the writer’s obsession with thought content, and the psychologizing of his character at the expense of the poetry. In too many of them the style betrays a wilful-exaggeration of the eccentricities which he had once turned to such great accounts but always the reader is liable to stumble across the passages which, in striking landscape or lovely lyrics, so that the true poetic gift is not completely absent.”

### Asolando (1889)

This monumental work is the swan of Browning’s life. It is a work of optimism and hope and we have traces of the firmness and enthusiasm of his prime. “The philosopher is forgotten, the dialectics put aside; we have once again, and for the last time, the passionate singer and the poet of human hopes, fears, loves and sorrows. Here is a note of confident courage that gives us the dominant note of Browning at his best.” (Compton-Rickett). Here Browning presents himself as a hopeful and optimistic fighter, describing himself in the character he most loved to adopt:



One who never turned his back but marched  
 breast forward.  
 Never doubted clouds would break  
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong  
 would triumph  
 Held we fall to rise, are buffed to fight better  
 Sleep to wake.  
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be  
 'Strive and thrive' ! Cry, Speed-fight on, for ever  
 There as here.'

### Browning's Dramas

Browning's genius was dramatic and in it he published *Bells and Pomegranates* containing eight dramas. These are, in order; *Strafford* (1837) *Pippa Passes* (1841) *King Victor and King Charles* (1842). *The return of the Druses* (1843), *A Blot in the Scentcheon* (1843) *Colombe's Birthday* (1844) *A Soul's Tragedy* 1846, *Luria* (1846), *In a Balcony* (1853), *Strafford* is a tragedy in five acts, dealing with the life of Strafford who sacrificed his life for the king Charles I. The devotion and faithfulness of this statesman are well represented in the tragedy. *Pippa Passes* is one of the finest works of Browning. It deals with the life of Pippa, a little factory girl and the joys of her life. The dramatic element in *Pippa Passes* is very little. It is the most unactable of Browning's plays. But its real charm lies in its lyric beauty, insight, idyllic charm and passion. The entire play consists of four successive episodes in each of which Pippa's song as she passes strike into a fateful situation and precipitates the issue. One of the songs of Pippa :

God's in his heaven,  
 All's right with the world.

represents Browning's attitude towards life. Of the remaining plays the most interesting and readable is '*A Blot in the Scentcheon*'. The scene of this play is English and the period is eighteenth century. It is a tragedy of love and the basis of the play is family pride and honour. The play bears a close resemblance to *Romeo and Juliet*. Browning's Dramas did not attract much attention and are a failure as drama. The two basic pillars of Drama are plot and action. Drama demands a sustained plot and a rapid action.



Drama may be defined 'as an articulate story presented in action.' In Browning's plays we have a story. It is articulate also, but it is not presented through action. It is given only spasmodically in action. Browning is more interested in the psychology and motives of his characters than in their action. It is this lack of action in Browning's plays that mars their success. Browning is retrospective, reminiscent and analytical. The presence of too much analysis and thinking in his plays is responsible for the failure of his dramas. "In a play which is to be seen, and where the *doing* has to affect us not the thinking, it is a serious drawback. Browning is not a dramatist but a dramatic philosopher. Accept this standpoint and his plays are interesting enough—some intensely interesting; but it is at its best the interest of the study rather than of the theatre". E. Albert directs our attention to the shortcomings of Browning as a dramatist in the following words—"Browning lacks the fundamental qualities of the dramatist. His amazingly subtle analysis of character and motive is not adequate for true drama because he cannot reveal character in action. His method is to take a character at a moment of crisis and by allowing him to talk, to reveal not only his present thoughts and feelings but his past history." The style of Browning is also responsible for his failure as a Dramatist. The style in his plays is terse and compact. It is not flexible. The simple factory girl Pippa and the magnificent Ottino use the English language with the same ease and fluency. This appears unconvincing like the characters of Bernard Shaw. His characters further bear a family likenesses. They are repetitions in different forms. Browning's plays tend to become one character plays. 'It is the proverbial predominance of Hamlet repeated in play after play.' For all these reasons Browning's dramas are failures on the stage and are at best 'closet plays' to be read and enjoyed in one's private study chamber.

### 3. Browning's genius

In any study of Browning it should be borne in mind that he was one of the most original geniuses in English; a man of study but unconventional character with a same and normal outlook of life; a poet who cared less for England and more for Renaissance; a man, in the words of Polonius, 'with more matter and less art' a poet with an imaginative sweep so vast as to include the prehistoric and Napoleon III, the natural theology of Caliban and the spiritualism of Mr. Sludge, the medium.



Browning's character was a strange mixture of certain contradictory elements. Compton Rickett says. "At the root of his genius lie certain contradictions in his character and temperament which help to explain the texture of his work." On the one hand he had a strangely unmalleable and self-contained nature. This explains his indifference of the conditions of the age as that of Keats on the other hand, side by side with this unmalleability there ran a wide range of intellectual interest—art, music, spiritualism, psychology, etc. "Intellectually a vagrant, he sought for his poetic adventures in all phases of life".

In certain things Browning was a typical Saxon : his reserve, his downrightness, his hatred of sentimental pose and of highfalutin. He disliked Bohemianism and had a sort of contempt for the aesthetes. Yet in some respects no one was less Saxon than he : in his cosmopolitan tastes, in his love of vehemence in expression and use of colour and in his passion for Italy. There is hardly a trace of national sentiment in his verse. He had no liking for the "creamy English girl".

The most interesting aspect of the combination of contradictory elements in his character was the presence of a cool, alert intellect side by side with ardent emotional power. The intellectual element was prominent in Browning from the beginning. It sometimes overpowered completely the artistic side of his genius and, as Dowden remarks, he sometimes "commits artistic suicide for the sake of psychological discovery". It led to an over-emphasis on the critical and philosophic element in his poetry. The prominence of intellectual element mars his later work. He is constantly critical, explanatory and argumentative. Action of the narrative is often stopped and comments and arguments are interposed. He intellectualised even the passion of Love. Poetry decayed as the argumentative, philosophical and ethical element became more prominent till his later work became, as Stopford Brooke said, "a huddle of metaphysical problems"

Yet again and again Browning takes up powerful emotional situations, particularly in his love poems. No poet has presented as many different emotional crises as Browning : revenge, jealousy, rivalry, suspicion, etc.

As a poet Tennyson has more in common with the eighteenth century than with his Romantic predecessors. Browning had many links with the romantic school as a poet of love; of crime, art and of Renaissance. But since Browning lived in an age in



which the romance of external adventure had been exhausted, he is interested in the romance of the soul rather than in romance of action. On the other side—he ethical side—he had his links with English Puritanism. He had the moral strenuousness, was wholly free from its self-sufficiency of the English Puritan. He the sturdiness and the asceticism, though the Romantic individualism remains in him and is reflected in his disregard of conventional poetic values.

#### 4. The tone and temper of his poetry

The first thing that strikes us in his poetry is the fundamental sanity of outlook and the normality of his temperament. J. Cohen says, "Thought, emotion and sensation were in a state of equipoise in him." While Browning portrayed the complex and involved passions of mankind he kept his feet firmly planted on the rock of reality. In his imaginative representations of criminals, artists, lovers and scholars he strives to produce an illusion of fact and not the illusion of dreams. "Romantic realism" Compton-Rickett calls it. With a firm hold on commonsense Browning launched himself into imaginative voyages into regions which the Victorians, on the whole, avoided. His genius was strongly rooted in real life. In the words of Compton-Rickett "he is, as a poet, pre-eminently a poet of *the* world. As an artist he seems—most convincing and most alive when he is the spectator of earthly life and earthly struggles, earthly joys and earthly difficulties. He loved life—every phase of it—"Scenting the world, looking it full in face; and with an immense physical zest and heartiness."

In spirit, in ruggedness of speech, in the strength of intellect, and in mental make up, Browning had more of a German in him. As Hugh Walker says "He was essentially a Teutonic Genius". His men and women and the environment in which he places them may be Italian but their spirit is German. Mrs. Orr speaks of his "Northern strenuousness of mood". His philosophy is akin to German thought though he is never believed to have read the German philosophers. Like the Germans, Browning was born fighter. "There is much of idealism in his poetry but he is more interested in the rough and tumble *fight* for the ideal than in the ideal itself. A "scrap" gave him unflinching delight. He deals with the roughness and tangles of life not in order to justify the ways of God to man but as an artist interested in the completeness of life".



Then welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough

*In Sordello he tells us :*

For what is joy ?  
To heave up one obstruction more.

He never yearns for "green pastures and still waters". The word 'repose' did not exist in his vocabulary. "He is at his best with the sword and buckler. He was a man of immense vitality and vitality must have an outlet".

Another aspect of his character must be remembered. He was "the most learned of English poets and his learning was woven in the fabric of his work as closely as Milton's". Browning had a very keen memory "a memory like the British Museum library", as G. K. Chesterton says, and his head was crammed with all kinds of knowledge—historical, artistic, religious—Greek, Renaissance and Jew. "Had he been asked which third cousin of Charlemagne was meant in *Sordello*, he would have given an account of the man, his father and grandfather."

### 5. Main subjects of Browning's Poetry

Browning was interested in a wide variety of subjects, and his poetry reveals him as a lover of art, psychology, philosophy, love, crime and a variety of other subjects. His interests were neither narrow nor insular, nor he sought to circumscribe his genius by confining his muse to the singing of the social, political, and economic conditions of his age. It is to be kept in mind that Browning was not half so interested in his age and its problems as Tennyson was and though, there are references to the rise of spiritualism (*Sludge the Medium*) and the ecclesiastical ferment caused by Newman in his poetry, yet as a whole, Browning chose to keep himself aloof from the problems of his age. His poetry fails to reflect the conditions of his time. His subject in poetry is not the problems of his age. "Browning did not much love to work on topics connected with his own generations. To him time was a matter almost of indifference; for the human soul, in which his interest was centred, has remained much the same since the days of Adam. If he had a preference, it was for the Indian Renaissance rather than for any other age or country" (Hugh Walker.)



The subjects in which Browning was primarily interested were philosophy, soul, religion, art, love, crime and lighter themes. Politics and revolutionery reforms failed to attract the poet. He was not prepared to use his poetic muse in the service of social and economic reforms.

Primarily the main subject of Browning's poetry is the soul and is varied and multifarious phases. In *Sordello* he made the statement .... 'My stress lay on the incidents in the development of the soul, little else is worth study'. His '*Men and Women*' pours forth the souls of fifty human beings in different phases of their life.

His vital work lies in his short poems, where he handles single situations or soul-states. He selects a highly special moment in the life of the man or woman whose soul he seeks to present in its working. "The world is for Browning in Keat's phrase, the "valley of soul-making" and every act, thought, and feeling of life is of concern only as it hinders or determines the soul on its course. To him love is the supreme experience and function of the soul, testing its temper and revealing its probable fate. In *Cristina*, *Evelyn Hope*, *The Last Ride Together*, *My Star*, *By the Fireside*, and many more, he has presented love in its varied phases and has celebrated its manifold meanings not only on earth but in the infinite range of worlds through which *he believes that the soul is destined to go in search after its own perfection* (Moody-Lovett).

Philosophy is given a rich expression in Browning's poetry. His poems are coloured with a philosophic touch. His philosophical poems, on which his reputation was based in his own day, "all bear on his central beliefs that life must ever be a striving for something beyond our reach, and that it is God's task to make the heavenly period perfect the earthen". *Rabbi Ben Ezra* is a representative philosophic work of the poet.

Love forms another very important subject of Browning's poetry. More than spiritual love he has given expression to physical love. His love poems deal both with successful as well as unsuccessful phases of love. His ideal of love is happy, married love represented in '*By the Fireside*'.

"Love is a word of all work as George Eliot said, and there are forms of love—love of country, love of family, the manly love of comrades—about which Browning says little or nothing. The love he writes of is love between man and woman, and that he



knows in many phases, from the fierce animal passion of Ottima, in *Pippa Passes* to the romantic love ("Queen Worship" as he called it so exquisitely rendered in *The Last Ride Together* and *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*. The natural end of such love is marriage, and Browning, like Donne in an earlier age, is the chosen poet of wedded love".

Browning's contemporaries, however, were less interested in his love poems than in his poems of religion that brought solace to 'many tender souls in that Victorian twilight of faith'. Religion was a subject dearer to Browning's heart and several of his poems deal with the theme of religion. His poem of religion "cover nearly the whole range of religious thought from the first dim gropings of the natural man for something above himself upto complete faith, and thence downward again to scepticism." *Caliban upon Setebos* is a poem dealing with the religion of a primitive brute. It goes to show that each man has the god whom he deserves Caliban's deity is created entirely out of his own nature, and the motives attributed to him are those upon which Caliban himself liked to act. Above Caliban stand poems such as *Cleon* and the *Epistle of Karshish*, in which the mood of heathens as they came in contact with Christianity is vividly represented. Two other religious poems *Soul* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra* are the utterances of Israelites, and inspite of their Jewish garb, there is in these poems the quintessence of true religion. *A Death in the Desert* is also worthy of notice and ranks high in Browning's religious poems. *Holy Cross Day* represents the force of evil in religious life. *Bishop Blougram's Apology* is a poem of wavering faith. The apology is put into the mouth of a man, who is quite sure whether to believe or not.

Art was another subject in which Browning was deeply interested, and some of his remarkable poems are devoted to the presentation of the life of artists and their creed. *Abi Vogler* deals with the soul of music. The musician's sense of the reality of his work is beautifully rendered in this poem. *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea Del Sarto* are poems dealing with painters and their art. They are intensely dramatic and the characters of the two painters are admirably drawn. Filippo Lippi is a sensualist, and is quite satisfied with his sensualism. Browning's dislike of the monastic abandonment of the world is presented in this poem. The character of Filippo Lippi is faulty and stained and yet it commands the poet's sympathy. Andrea Del Sarto is a character of a higher order. He also falls like Filippo Lippi, yet he is



loved by the readers for his repentance and unholy love for wealth. His great defect is that he bartered his gifts for gold and 'all his life he is poisoned by the wrong he has done his own higher nature'.

Crime was another subject that attracted Browning. The poet had a lovely dramatic interest in villainy, crime, murder and similar other felonies of life. His '*Ring and the Book*' is an interesting study of the murder of Pompilia by her husband count Guido. Here Browning throws light on the subject of murder from different view-points. *The Laboratory* deals with the secret desire of a woman to obtain poison for her rival. *Porphyria's Lover* represents a mad man's psychology who kills his beloved to own her for ever. Thus Browning's interest in crime and the seamy side of life is equally a powerful subject of his poetry.

Mediaevalism, which had exercised a potent influence on Romantic poets, like Keats and Coleridge, failed to attract Browning. The Mediaeval Ages had no appeal for him. "To him, chivalry counted for little, and the faith of the Middle Ages perhaps for even less. We hear little in his verse of tournaments and feats of arms. Instead of representing Browning as a matter of the lore of the Middle Ages, it seems more consistent with the facts to say that no man of his time was more completely free from their influence".

Lighter subjects also interested Browning. His one poem '*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*' is sufficient to show his skill and mastery in the handling of lighter themes. The poem deals in a jocular manner the menace of rats in Hamelin and tells us how the piper brought about the end of the rats. When the Mayor refused to honour his words and failed to pay the stipulated amount to the Piper, the same piper played havoc by taking away a number of children in cave from which they never returned. It is a poem written in a lighter vein.

Browning's subjects were wide and varied and he succeeded in giving a fine poetic representation to the subjects of his heart's desire.

## 6. Browning as a poet of Love

Browning is one of the greatest love poets in the whole range of English poetry. Nowhere does he exhibit his native strength more clearly than in his treatment of love. Love of Browning is



the meeting point of God and man. Love is the supreme principle both of morality and religion. It is the most perfect form of goodness and the one way that leads to the God-head. It is the quality by which man touches the infinite, the quality common to God and man. It is the philosophic principle which harmonises and unifies all beings. It is the creative cause and the sustaining and perfecting power. It is also the moral ideal towards which man must strive to advance—

O world, as God has made it all is beauty  
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty

A life devoted to love is an ennobling life and leads man higher and higher—

“Love once evoked, once admitted into the soul  
Ands worth to worth”

A life devoid of love is arid and barren. This is what Aprile brings home to Paracelsus—

“Love preceding power  
And with much power, much more love”

‘Love is the great magician clothing the barrenness of earth with the glory of summer ! This is brought out in ‘Natural magic’.

Browning has touched on the cosmic importance of love in human life, but the poetry does not actually deal so much with divine love or love of God, love of country, love of family, the manly love of comrades, as with physical love—the love between man and woman. “The love poems of Browning” says Stopford A. Brooke “do not mean those poems which deal with absolute love or the love of the ideas as truth and beauty or love of mankind or country, but it means the isolating passion of one sex for the other chiefly in youth whether moral or immoral.” The love Browning writes of his love between man and woman. He has understood that wide and varied phases of love and gives expression to all sides of physical love varying from the fierce animal passion of Ottima in *Pippa Passes* to the romantic love (‘Queen Worship’ he called it) so exquisitely rendered in the *Last Ride Together* and *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*. There is nothing personal about his love-poems. His personal story impressed itself upon his poetry only through the preoccupation



which it induces with the love-stories of other people mostly quite unlike his own.

Browning's love-poetry is intensely realistic in character. A man loves a woman not because she is a goddess, not because she is a real woman, "with her curls, her dented chin, but little tricks of speech, all the causeless laughters, the little private jokes and common memories that are the stuff of intimacy. That is the real thing, and in that kind of love-poetry Browning is a master." Realism is the central working force of Browning's love-poetry. The imagery of his love-poetry is of suburban streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos, window-blinds, fashionable fur coats etc. "Browning's love-poetry is the finest in the world, because It does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven, says G.K. Chesterton, "but about window panes and gloves and garden-walls. It does not deal with abstractions. It is the truest of all love-poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when *common and dead things* had a meaning beyond the power of any millionaire to compute". Browning uses realistic images in the presentation of his woman in love. In a *Lover's Quarrel* he gives a peep into realistic method by picturing his lady as a modern girl.

"See how she looks now, dressed  
In a sledging cap and vest  
'Tis a huge for cloak—  
Like a reindeers yoke  
Falls the lappest along the breas  
Sleeves for her arm to rest,  
Or to hang, as my Love likes best"

Browning *intellectualises* the passion of love. He is not a poet of passionate feeling but of the psychology of passion. There is nothing in him of the deep, tormented, sensual strain that at once attracts or repels us in Donne ; but there is the same activity of intellect, the same rush of thought through the impassioned mind, in such poems as *Too Late*, *The Last Ride Together*, *Cristina* etc. His lovers indulge in dissecting and analysing their passion. "As a rule the mood of passion is longer flashed upon us than the poet seems to detach himself from the purely individual emotion" and is engaged with the *results* of that emotion on the lover's life. This analysing and psycholising of love is



present in *The Last Ride Together* where the lover is not so much interested in his beloved, as in dealing with the problem of failure and success in love. "The emotion of love is always entwined with grave questions of life and conduct in Browning's love poetry".

Another offshoot of his intellectualisation of passion in Browning's love poetry is that the poet instead of dwelling on the beauty of the woman, concentrates on the power wielded by her in sex-life. Browning's love-poems provide little feast of beauty by recounting the physical charms of his women in love. Light feet and creamy breasts do not figure in Browning's poems of love. "For the rest he insists rather on the power of the woman to transfigure man's life, lift it on to a nobler level, and give it new strength as in *By the Fire Side* or enmesh it in sensuous beauty as in *Andrea Del Sarto*".

In his love poems Browning's method is dramatic rather than lyrical. The pure passion of love is not rung out in lyrical strains as in Herrick or Burns. The dramatic element is present in the reactions of the man or woman to a particular situation. '*The Last Ride Together*' is dramatic in its utterance. Most of the love poems of Browning are in the form of dramatic monologues, and it is doubtful whether they could have been impressive in any other form.

Browning's love poetry is both complex and comprehensive dealing with cases of successful as well as unsuccessful love. Of the poems whose subject is physical love, about two-third represents the feelings of man, and one-third the feelings of woman's. The love of man is partly successful and partly unsuccessful and as such some poems are poems of successful love, while others are marked with a note of despair. Among the successful poems of love we have "*By the Fireside*", "*Respectability*" and "*One Word More*". Poems marked with a note of failure and despair are "*Love among the Ruins*", "*In a Gondola*", "*Porphyria's Lover*", "*A Lover's Quarrel*", "*Love in a Life*", "*One way of Love*".

Poems dealing with the love of women can also be divided into two parts. (1) Successful love poems (2) unsuccessful love poems. The successful love poems in which women have succeeded are "*Parting of Morning*", "*A Woman's Last Word*" "*Any Wife to any Husband*", "*Count Gismond*". Poems in which women



have met buffets of fortune are "*The Laboratory*" and "*In a Year*." Love poems dealing with women's passion lack that width of view and intellectual power that we notice in poems dealing with the love of men.

All love poems of Browning whether dealing with cases of successful love or failure in love end on a note of optimism and triumph. The triumphant note is nicely sounded in the concluding lines of *Evelyn Hope*, where the old man puts a scroll in the "sweet cold hand" of his dead beloved hoping that some day when she awakes she "will remember and understand". The Lover in '*Last Ride Together*' is optimistic and the poem ends on a note of hope—

"What if we still ride on, we two  
With life for ever old yet new,  
Changed not in kind but in degree,  
The instant more eternity,  
And Heaven just prove that I and she  
Ride, ride, together, for ever ride?"

Browning lays emphasis on married love and like Donne in an earlier age, is the chosen poet of wedded love. This is well presented in "*By The Fireside*" The motto of Browning's love poetry is well put in the beautiful stanza from *By the Fireside*—one of the noblest and truest he ever penned :

"Oh the little more and how much it is  
And the little less, and what worlds away  
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss  
Or a breath suspended the blood's best play  
And life be a proof of this"

Compton-Rickett has beautifully summed up Browning's position as a love poet in the following words—"Certain aspects of love have been more finely rendered by other poets ; but in range of matter Browning has no superior. There are abysses of tragic horror, agonies of sense and spirit, at which he took no more than a glimpse. It was not in his nature to dwell on them. His splendid vitality and buoyant hopefulness recoiled from them. His art as a poet of love suffers limitations to that extent, but the underlying inspiration is the greater. For his outlook on love is the outlook of a man who puts it in front of any other thing in life, as a force for sanctifying and strengthening the soul."



### 7. Browning's Dramatic Monologue.

Browning signalised his career as a dramatic-poet by writing a number of dramas. At least eight dramas were produced by the poet in his life of which some such a *Strafford* and *The Blot on the Scutcheon* are quite significant. But Browning's dramas could not be acted on the stage for in them the thought element was more prominent than action. Drama may be defined 'as an articulate story presented in action'. The element of action is wanting in Browning's plays and as such they could not be successful on the stage. Browning was far too interested in the effect of the drama on the character, and this proved to be a snag in the success of his plays on the stage.

Browning failed to achieve success on the stage because his characters indulged more in introspection, reminiscence and analysis of motives than action. His was the drama not of the outer world of events, but the inner world of the soul, "where nothing was of importance unless it was transmuted into a form influencing mind and character".

Though the poet could not succeed in presenting actable plays on the stage ; yet it could not be denied that nature had endowed him with dramatic skill of a rare kind. The dramatic skill of the poet was well represented in the Dramatic Monologue of which he became the supreme master. Here Browning could achieve success because the dramatic speech or monologue essentially imitates action, focussed in a particular mind, and the poet had the knack of presenting experiences of other characters in a dramatic manner. The chief concern of dramatic poetry, as Browning believed, was the representation of "the incidents in the development of a soul" and the dramatic monologue appeared to the poet as the ideal form in which the soul of a man and the inner feelings of his heart could be represented. Browning's end was the revelation of character, of thoughts, passions, the spirit-life of man, and "the poet thought these things could best be presented directly in the dramatic poem by catching and representing the character in a sort of confessional monologue indulged at some high critical moment of life" A. C. Aikat in his admirable study of. Browning has pointed out that the poet chose the monologue for subjective, partly objective, partly psychological or ethical reasons. To defend himself from adverse criticism to choose this form, for thought expressed in an *oblique* manner through the monologue were likely to escape criticism. Secondly, he felt "that truths inculcated directly glance of athwart the



mind, and so defeat their own purpose. Whereas truths envisaged Indirectly or obliquely (as in a Dramatic Monologue) are to be efficacious by setting men to think for themselves." The dramatic monologue was cultivated and developed by Browning with great success. As Hugh Walker points out "Browning did not invent the dramatic monologue, but he made it specially his own, and not one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it." In these monologues Browning had the chance, as Mrs. Browning hinted in *Aurora Leigh*.

"To outgrow  
The simulation of the painted scene,  
Boards actors, prompters, gaslight and costume,  
And take for a noble stage the soul itself,  
In shifting actions and celestial lights  
With all its grand orchestral silences  
To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds"

Having presented Browning's preference for the dramatic monologue, let us now examine its salient features. Young defines dramatic monologue thus : "This is a kind of comprehensive soliloquy, absorbing into its substance by the speaker's keenly observant glance the surrounding scenery and audience bringing all that is pertinent to the chosen movement by the channels of memory, argument, curiosity and association ; adding through the deep-graven lines which habit has incised upon character much which the soul would fain conceal, or is even more unconscious of the necessity for concealing ; and enriching the current of self-revealing speech with the product of any other emotion which may have been powerful enough to share in the fashioning of this critical movement." A dramatic monologue is very much like a soliloquy—one man's speech—but there is a difference between the two. In a soliloquy the speaker delivers his own thoughts, without being interrupted or disturbed by objections or propositions of other persons. In the dramatic monologue there is the presence of a second person to whom the thoughts of the speaker are presented, though the second man may not interrupt the main speaker. "Some of the dramatic monologues are in the form of soliloquy" says Allen Brockington, "but the majority are conversational—that is to say, there are listners and the presence of the listners affects the talk. Often, the remarks of the listners are indirectly introduced or indicated by the speaker's answers"



In *My Last Duchess* the listener is the messenger who has come to the Duke from another state to negotiate about a second marriage. The Duke's talk is carefully calculated to impress the messenger. In *Andrea Del Sarto* the listener is the painter's beautiful wife Lucrezia who attends to what Andrea says—though she is impatient to join a cousin waiting in the street below. In *Bishop Blougram's Apology* the listener is a journalist named Gigadibs, and the 'apology' is an answer to him for his objections against the Bishop's conduct. In *Fra Lippo Lippi* the listeners are the members of the watch who have brought Lippo's arrest while he was engaged in a nocturnal adventure.

The earliest glimpses of the Dramatic monologue are to be found in *Panline*. Here the form is *hinted*. It is *disguised* in *Paracelsus* and *developed* in a still disguised form in *Sordello*. The real beginning of this form was made in the *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842)—*Fonannes Ageicola* and *Porphyria's Lover* (originally named *Medhouse cells*). "These extraordinary little poems reveal not only an imagination of intense fire and heat" says Symon (*An Introduction to the Study of Browning*), "but an almost finished art—a power of conceiving subtle mental complexities with clearness and of expressing them in a picturesque—form and perfect lyric language. Each poem renders a single mood and renders it completely". It is in *My Last Duchess* that the first experiment in dramatic monologue is made. The poem is a subtle study in the jealousy of egoism, and is a typical study of Renaissance man, the Duke of Ferrara marked with selfishness, cruelty and genuine devotion to art. Browning's next elaborate dramatic monologue is *Pictor Ignotos*, which finds its place in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845). It reveals a painter's soul as clearly as possible and is a sort of first foreshadowing of *Andrea Del Sarto*. Two more important monologues of this volume are *The Bishop orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church* and *The Laboratory*. Later on in *Men and Women* (1855) the Dramatic monologue was developed with great skill and it almost attained perfection. Of this volume the significant monologues are *Andrea Del Sarto*, *Epistle of Karshish*, *Fra Lippo Lippi Cleon* and *The Last Ride Together*.

The larger portion of Browning's next volumes of poems *Dramatic Personae* (1864), consists of dramatic monologues, the chief of them being '*A Death in the Desert*'. The monologues of this volume are 'elaborate and extended'. In these later monolo-



gues Browning "started afresh to probe men's minds, to follow up their trains of thoughts, to track their prejudices and obsessions. Hence his later monologues become not obscure but tortuous and labyrinthine. Occasionally they are difficult because he sometimes found his most promising material among archaic characters whose thoughts were complicated by a jumble of old notions, quite foreign to the modern mind." *The Ring and the Book* is itself a collection of monologues presented in the mouth of different characters recounting the murderers of Pompilia.

In these dramatic monologues Browning portrays a wide variety of characters—crooks, cowards, scholars, poets, musicians, painters, dukes, murderers, cheats etc. The souls of these characters are brought out in all varied forms in these monologues. They are soul reflectors. Cazamian calls these monologues "Studies in Practical Psychology" for they reveal a wide variety of characters and provide us peep into the inner workings of their minds.

The monologues of Browning are highly suggestive. The speeches of the main actors can be interpreted in more than one ways.

The characters in these monologues believe in God, and justify their deeds and actions by attributing them to God's will. *Sludge the Medium* is certain that his life of lies and conjuring tricks has been conducted in a deep and subtle obedience to God's commands. Bishop Blougram is certain that his life of panic stricken and tottering compromise has been really justified by God's will. Andrea Del Sarto says to his wife—

"At the end  
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes,  
All is as God overrule"

Browning's Dramatic Monologues are mixtures of half truths and falsehoods. They are not truthful records, but defences, represented in a tricky and subtle style.

In the opinion of some critics the dramatic monologues are satires upon their characters. They appear to be an exposition of their follies. But this is not a just criticism. "The great sophisticated monologues which Browning wrote in later years" says G.K. Chesterton, "are not satires upon their subjects. They are not even harsh or unfeeling exposures of them. They are defences.



They say or are intended to say the best that can be said for the persons with whom they deal". *The Last Ride Together* is a defence of the lover, who failed in his love, and so is *Andrea Del Sarto*, defence of the character of the painter.

It is pointed out that Browning's language in these monologues is coarse and brutal. This is only a partial truth for there are fine passages of beauty couched in a poetic language. In *Bishop Blougram's Apology* there is a beautiful passage—

"Just when we are safest, there is a sunset touch  
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death  
A chorus ending from Euripides"

The *Last Ride Together* is rich in beautiful passages marked with a real charm of language.

Browning's philosophy of life is best brought out in the dramatic monologues. In *Andrea Del Sarto*, the poet emphasises the necessity of cultivating higher hopes and cherishing noble aspirations :

"Ah a man's reach should exceed his grasp  
Or what's a Heaven for"

To sum up : "These collections of Monologues form together one of the most precious and profoundly original contributions to the poetic literature of the nineteenth-century. The defects which prevented his complete success in the regular drama are not apparent in this cognate form. He takes just what interests him, and consequently he is nearly always inspired, nearly always at his best".

—(High Walker).

**A critical Note on : Dramatic Moments ; Survey of Monologues and Browning as an artist.**

In the perfection of the dramatic monologue Browning was a great artist, incomparably greater than his more popular contemporary. Browning's best poems are cast in this form. He gave it great variety and richness. He always takes up the subjects that interest him and never like Tennyson, reflects any contemporary craze. The result is that he always at his best in these monologues. His love poems and imaginative representations are in this form. It suited his genius perfectly.



The dramatic monologue presents great difficulties. It is an exacting form and requires great skill. It has to tell a story and that too not at great length. The character of the speaker must be portrayed distinctly and vividly and should be dramatically appropriate to the theme. The thought of the poem should appear as natural expression of character. Browning achieved success in these, not once, but in several poems. *Andrea Del Sarto*, *How it Strikes a Contemporary*, *Grammarian's Funeral* are great monologues.

It has been pointed out already that Browning loves to work on the "the great moment." But the movement in his monologues is not through action but in thought. As Compton-Rickett says, "Browning was not interested in action at all—but in reaction—the result of action on character." Browning usually "isolates an emotion or a mood and either traces it through varying phases as in *Andrea Del Sarto* or seizes it in its moment of culmination" as in *Porphyria's Lover*. In a large number of monologues blank-verse is used. It is dreamy and slow moving in *Andrea Del Sarto*. In *the Bishop Orders His Tomb* it is broken and tassellated.

Browning portrays a wide variety of characters—crooks, cowards, scholars, poets, musicians, painters, dukes, murderers, cheats etc. To impart a realistic colour to his portrayal he adds local colour and detail. The Grammarian was racked by Tussia and Calculus. The monologues show Browning's knowledge of human nature, specially its dark recesses and pitfalls. He was got interested in simple characters. The more tangled the character, the more passionate and stormy the experience, the more labyrinthine the story, the greater was the zest with which Browning approached them. He was more interested in the complexities of motive and unexpectedness of human behaviour. Cazamian calls his monologues "Studies in Practical Psychology"

It is rather strange that inspite of all his intellectual effort and imaginative power, Browning has not produced a single character that lives outside his pages as the creation of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens do. "There is not Hamlet, no Don Juan either". Some of Browning's characters, e. g. Cleon and Kharshish, are hardly personages. They tend to become his puppets and voice, like the characters of Shaw, their creator's views on life and death and love. As Mrs. Orr says, "he does not sink himself in his men and women." According to F. L.



Lucas, "most of Browning's characters are very much himself. "Browning's own personality is manifest" writes E. C. Stedman "in the speech and movement of almost every character". Browning does not possess the power of forgetting himself. J. Cohen says that "in defending, expounding and pleading" Browning's characters "speak their own case, and in part of poet himself....." Cazamian complains that the voice of Browning's characters is not the spontaneous speech of a living being. "They all speak Browningsque". It appears as if Browning's aim is to present a situation or an idea or a passion rather than persons.

In character portrayal Browning lacked the Keatsian 'Negative Capability' or that disinterestedness which produces living characters. The "invisible was far more important for Browning than the visible". His love of ideas prevents him from being fully dramatic. We feel perhaps his purpose in creating characters was to make them serve as questioners, objectors and answerers in the great debate that proceeds throughout his poems". Browning does not let his characters alone. He imposes his own intellect and consciousness over them. He is all the time present with them. Each of them analyses, discusses, and argues in the manner of Browning. He portrays his characters through the argumentative method. Shakespeare lets them unfold themselves naturally through speech and action.

Broadly speaking we might divide Browning's characters in two categories : those in whom intellect is predominant like the Grammarian, and those in whom lofty emotion is predominant, like Andrea the faultless painter. He is more successful in portraying women than in presenting men characters. They have distinct personalities and are more individualised. Each of his women is distinct from the others. But he does not idealise them romantically. They are presented as acting and reacting in varied circumstances, pleasant and unpleasant. Like Shakespeare and Meredith he represents them as possessing a finer and stronger intellect than men.

## 8. Browning's Treatment of Man

The most marked feature in Browning's poetry is his interest in character. He is a great master in the art of representing the inner side of human beings, their mental and moral qualities. His message to the world is that of an interpreter of life, but his



art is, from first to last, a faithful reflection of human nature, the human nature of hundreds of different characters. But he was interested not in the mass of humanity but different individual characters. In this connection, Chesterton has rightly remarked : "To Browning, probably the beginning and end of all optimism was to be found in the faces in the street. To him they were all the masks of a deity, the heads of a hundred-headed Indian good of nature. Each one of them looked towards some quarter of the heavens, not looked upon by another by any other eyes. Each one of them wore some expression, some blend of eternal joy and eternal sorrow, not to be found in any other countenance. The sense of the absolute sanctity of human difference was the deepest of all his senses. He was hugely interested in all human things, but it would have been quite impossible to have said of him that he loved humanity. He did not love humanity but men. His sense of difference between one man and another would have made the thought of melting them into a lump called humanity simply loathsome and prosaic. It would have been to him like playing four hundred airs at once. The mixture would not combine at all, it would lose all. Browning believed that to every man that ever lived upon this earth had been given a definite and peculiar confidence of God. Each one of us was engaged on secret service ; each one of us had a peculiar message each one of us the founder of a religion. Of that religion one thoughts, our faces, our boots, our tastes, our virtues, and even our vices, were more or less fragmentary and inadequate expression".

Browning's treatment of human character is unique in this respect that he concentrates on the "soul of man." He peers into all the nooks and chambers of the soul with inexhaustible enterprise. "In this respect Herford has observed : "No saying of Browning's is more familiar than that in which he declared 'incidents in the development of souls' was something very different from the democratic enthusiasm for humanity, or the Wordsworthian joy in the 'common tears and worth of every village'. 'The quiet routine existence of uneventful lives hardly touched him more than the placid quiescence of quinal and vegeable existence : the commonplace in human nature so he passes by with a light concern the natural relationships into which men are born, as compared with those which they enter by passion or choice. The bond of kinship, the love between



parents and children, brothers and sisters, so prolific of poetry elsewhere, is singularly rare and unimportant in Browning, to whom every other variety of the love, between men and women was kindling theme. The names of husband, of wife, of lover, vibrate for him with a poetry more thrilling than any or those excite elsewhere in the poetry of his generation. But the mystic glory which in Blake and Wordsworth and Coleridge gathered about unconscious childhood in all but fled . . . . His choicest and loveliest figures are lonely and unattached. Pippa, David, Pompilia, Sordello, Paracelsus, Balaustion, Mildred, Caponasacchi, have no ties of home or blood, or only such as work malignly upon their fate. Mildred had no another, and she falls : Sordello moves like a Shelleyan shadow about his father's house : Balaustion breaks away from the ties of kindred to become a spiritual daughter of Athens : Paracelsus goes forth, glorious in the possession of the secret of 'the world' which is his alone : Caponasacchi himself sisterless, motherless, releases, Pompilia from the doom inflicted on her by her parent's calculating greed ; the song of Pippa releases Lingi from the nobler but yet hurtful bondage of his mother's love . . . .

Responsive to the personal cry of the solitary hero, Browning rarely caught or cared to reproduce the vaguer multitudinous murmur of the great mass. In his dominion isolating imagination, the voice of the solitary soul rings over with thrilling clearness, but the still sad music of humanity escapes. The incoherent and the abolescent, the indistinctness of immaturity, the incipient disintegration of decay, the deepening shadow of oblivion, the half-instinctive and organic bond of custom, whatever stirs the blood but excites only blurred images in the brain, and steals into character without passing through the gates of passion or of thought, finds imperfect or capricious reflection in his verse. Browning's interest in 'soul' was not then, a diffused in human nature as such. But on the other hand, human nature stood for too much for his sense of what all personality at the lowest was too keen, to allow him to relish, or make such use of, those unpsychological amalgams of humanity and thought—the personified abstractions . . . . Personality, to interest him, had to possess a possible status in the world of experience. It had to be of the earth, and like its inhabitants"

Symons in his book, *Introduction to the Study of Browning* ; has explained at length the methods adopted by



Browning in order to probe into the souls of his individual characters : "Most poets endeavour to sink the individual in the universal : it is the special distinction of Browning that when he is most universal he is most individual. As a thinker he conceives of humanity not as an aggregate, but as a collection of units. Most thinkers write and speak of man but Browning of men. With man as a species, with man as a society he does not concern himself, but with individual man and men. Every man is for him an epitome of the universe, a centre of creation. Life exists for each as completely and separately as if he were the only inhabitant of our planet. He conceives of each man as placed in the earth with the purpose of probation. Life is given him as a test of his quality ; he is exposed to the chances and changes of existence, to the opposition and entanglement of circumstances, to evil, to doubt, to the influence of his fellow-men, and to the conflicting powers of his own soul ; and he succeeds or fails, towards God, or as regards his real end and aim, according as he is true or false to his better nature, his conceptions of right. He is not judged by the vulgar standards of worldly success or unsuccess ; not even by his actions, good or bad as they may seem to us, for action can never fully translate the thought or motive which lay at its root ; success or unsuccess, the prime and final fact in life, lies between his soul and God. The poet, in Browning's view of him, in God's witness, and must see and speak for God. He must therefore conceive of each individual separately and distinctively, and he must see how each soul conceives of itself. "Here is it that Browning parts Company most decisively with all other poets who concern themselves exclusively with life-dramatic poets, call them ; so that it seems almost necessary to invent some new term to define precisely his special attitude. And hence it is that in his drama thought plays comparatively so large, and action comparatively so small, a part ; hence, that action is valued only insofar as it reveals thought or motive, not for own sake, as the crown and flower of these,

To the motive, he endeavours, he heart's self  
His quick sense looks ; he crowns and calls aright  
The soul O' the purpose, ere 'tis shaped as act,  
Takes flesh I' the world, and clothes itself a king.

*Luria Act III*

For his endeavour is not to set men in action for the pleasure of seeing them move ; but to see and show in their action alike,



the real impulses of their being ; to see how each soul conceives of itself.

“This individuality of presentment is carried out equally in the domain of life and thought ; as each man lives, so he thinks and perceives, so he apprehends God and truth, for himself only. It is evident that this special stand point will give not only a unity but an originality to the works of which it may be called the root ; equally evident that it will demand a special method and a special instrument.

“The dramatic poet in the ordinary sense, in the sense in which we apply it to Shakespeare and the Elizaethans, aims at showing by means of action, the development of character as it manifests to the world in deeds. His study is character, but it is character in action, considered only in connection with a particular grouping of events, and only so far as it produces or operates upon these. The processes are concealed from us, we see the result. In the very highest realisation of his dramatic power, and always in intention, we are presented with a perfect perfect picture in which every actor lives, and every word is audible ; perfect complete in itself, without explanation, without comment ; a dogma incarnate, which we must accept as it is given us and explain illustrate for ourselves. If we wish to know what this character or that thought or felt in his every soul, we may perhaps have a data from which to construct amore or less probable hypothesis ; but that is all. We are told nothing ; we care but little to know of what is going on in the thought ; of the infinitely subtle meshes of motive or emotion which will perhaps find no direct outcome in speech, or direct manifestation in action, but which the soul's life is reality subsists. This is not the intention : it is spectacle of life in action.

“But is there no other sense in which a poet may be dramatic, besides this sense of the acting drama, no new form possible which

peradventure may outgrow  
The simulation of the painted scene,  
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight and costume,  
And take for a nobler stage the soulitself,  
Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,



With all its grand orchestral silences,  
To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds.

(*Aurora Leigh, Book Fifth*)

This new form of drama is the drama as we see it in Browning, a drama of the interior, a tragedy or comedy of the soul. Instead of a grouping of characters which shall act as one another to produce a certain result in action, we have a grouping of events useful or important only as they influence the character or the mind. This is very clearly explained in the original advertisement to *Paracelsus*, where Browning tells that his poem is an attempt.

'I to reverse the method usually adopted by whose aim it is to set forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions, by the operation of persons and events ; and that, instead of having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis. I desire to produce, I ventured to display somewhat minutely the method itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined, to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded'

In this way, by making the soul the centre of action, he is enabled (thinking himself into it, as all dramatists must do) to bring out its characteristics, to reveal its very nature. Suppose he is attracted by some particular soul or by some particular act. The problem occupies him—the more abstruse and entangled the more attractive to him it is ; he winds his way into the heart of it, or we might better say, he picks to pieces the machinery. Presently he begins to reconstruct, before our eyes, the whole series of events, the whole substance of the soul, but, so to speak, turned inside out. We watch the workings of the mental machinery as it slowly disclosed before us ; we note its specialities of construction, its individual character, the interaction of parts, every secret of it. We thus come to see that, considered from the proper point of view, everything is clear, regular and explicable in however tangled an action, however obscure a soul, we see that everything external is perfectly natural when we can view its evolution from the internal. It must be supposed that Browning explained this in the manner of an anatomical lecturer ; he makes every character explain itself by its own speech, and very often by speech—that is, or seems, sophistical, but which, being personal and individual explains—perhaps by



exposing—its speaker. Such then are Browning's consistent mental attitude and his special method. But he has also a special instrument—the monologue”

Browning's art of characterisation is not photographic but poetic and creative, based on his imaginative realism. The best example of it is the story of Pompilia in *The Ring and the Book*, related by her in a simple, childlike, dreamy, wondering way. As pointed out by Symonds “It is a song of serene and quiet beauty, beautiful as evening-twilight”. It is, too, a splendid example of the power of imaginative sympathy. For, though it is a man-who writes, we have here the whole heart of a woman—of a young and dying mother, most unhappy all the days of her life, quiet only for a space to die in the whole heart, and the very speech and accent as of the truest, sweetest, purest and most womanly of women. You cannot analyse the perfume of a flower, not yet prove its beauty by displacing a petal. Still, here are two or three most tender and touching lines. Pompilia is speaking of the birth of her babe.

A whole long fortnight ; in a life like mine  
 A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much,  
 All women are not mothers of a boy,  
 Though they live twice the length of my wholly life,  
 And as they fancy, happily all the same,  
 There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long.  
 As if it would continue, broaden out  
 Happily more and more, and lead to heaven,  
 Christmas before me—was not than a chance ?  
 I never realised God's birth before—  
 How He grew like God in being born.  
 The time I felt like Mary, had my babe  
 Lying a little on my breast like hers,

With a beautiful and holy confidence she now ‘lays away her babe with God secure for him in the future. She forgives the husband who has slain her : I could not love him but his mother did’ And with her last breath she blesses the friend who has saved her :

O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,  
 No work begun shall ever pause for death.  
 .....  
 So let him wait God's instant men call years ;



Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,  
 Do out thy duty ? Through such souls alone  
 God's stooping shows sufficient of His light,  
 For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

Browning's poetic faculty does not fail him even when he is dealing with the worst types of characters. In this connection, Chesterton has remarked "A vain, ill mannered, and trustworthy egotist, defending his own sordid doings with his own cheap and weather-beaten philosophy, is very likely to express himself in a language flexible and pungent but indelicate and without dignity. But the peculiarity of these loose and almost slangy soliloquies is that very now and then in them there occurs burst of pure poetry which are like a burst of birds singing. Browning does not hesitate to put some of the most perfect lines that he or any one else ever wrote in the English language into the mouths of such slaves as Sludge and Guido Franceschini. Take, for the sake of example, Bishop Blougram's Apology. The poem is one of the most grotesque in the poet's works. It is intentionally redolent of the solemn materialism and patrician grossness of a grand dinner-party. But in it there comes the passage :

Just when we are safest, there's a sunset touch,  
 A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,  
 A chorus ending from Euripides—  
 And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears.  
 Is old and new at once as nature's self  
 To rap and knock and enter in our soul,  
 Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring  
 Round the ancient idol, on his base again—  
 The grand perhaps.

Nobler diction and a nobler meaning could not have been put into the mouth of Pompilia, or Rabbi Ben Ezra. It is in reality put into the mouth of a vulgar, fashionable priest, justifying his own cowardice over the comfortable wine and the cigars".

Browning's range of character-study is wonderful and various. Lafcadio Hearn, in his book, *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets*, has remarked : "I cannot insist too much upon this quality of versatility in Browning, this display of Shakespearean power. In all Tennyson you will find scarcely more than twenty really distinct characters and some of those are but half-drawn. In Rossetti you will find scarcely more than half a dozen, mostly



women. In Swinburne there is no character whatever, except the poet's own, outside of that grand singer's dramatic work. But in Browning there are hundreds of distinct characters, and there is nothing at all vague about them ; they speak, they move, they act with real and not artificial life. Sometimes a character may occupy a hundred pages. Sometimes it may be drawn in half a dozen lines, but the drawing is distinct and equally true. And there is scarcely any kind of human nature of which we have no picture."

Browning does not give us only noble type of characters; very often he paints the ugly side of human nature. In fact the dark characters predominate in his poetry. In this connection Lafcadio Hearn has observed : "Do not suppose, however, that the poet picks out by preference, the noble or attractive side of human feeling in any form of society for his subject. Quite the contrary, most often he paints the ugly side, even in speaking of kings and courts, nobles and princes. In the splendid poem *Count Gismond* there is one very beautiful side of knightly character, but there are very horrible phases of human nature exhibited in the story. Browning made the shadows very heavy, with the result that the light appeared more dazzling. Sometimes we have no lights—all is shadow, and sometimes a shadow of hell. Such is the case with the horrible poem called *The Laboratory*, depicting the feelings of a jealous court lady : as she stares in the laboratory of a chemist, who is selling poison with which she intends to poison her rival in the favour of the king. A still blacker shadow, a still more infernal picture of humanity's dark side, is *The Heretic's Tragedy* portraying the wicked feelings of a superstitious person while watching a heretic being burned alive. Another frightful thing is *The Confessions* a story of the inquisition in Spain, showing how the inquisitors succeeded in burning alive a young man, by taking advantage of the innocence of his sweetheart, who was made to betray him through confession without knowing it.....There are multitudes of poems of this class in Browning. He wants us to know all the strange possibilities of the human soul bad or good and he never hesitates because a subject may be shocking to weak nerves".

It is not merely different types of character that Browning has portrayed in his poems, but he has also given us a picture of various epochs of human civilisation from the primitive to the modern by giving his characters such settings. In this connec-



tion Symons has observed : "Only in Shakespeare can we find anything like the same variety of distinct human characters—vital creations endowed with thoughtful life ; and not even perhaps in Shakespeare such novelty and variety of milieu. There is scarcely a salient epoch in the history of modern world which he has not touched always with the same vital and distinctive sympathy based on profound and accurate knowledge. Passing by the legendary and undeveloped ages and civilisations of East and West, he has painted the first dawn of the modern spirit in the Athens of Socrates and Euripides, revealed the whole temper and tendency of the twilight age between Paganism and Christianity, and recorded the last utterance of the last apostle of the now conquering creed ; he has distilled the very essence of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the very essence of the modern world. The men and women who live and move in the new world of his creation are as varied as life itself. They are kings and beggars, saints and lovers, great painters, musicians, priests and popes, Jews, gipsis and dervishes, street girls, princesses, dancers with the wicked watchery of the daughter of Hetodias, wives with the devotion of the wife of Brutus, joyous girls and manevolent graybeards, statesmen, cavaliers, soldiers of humanity tyrants and bigots, ancient sages and modern spiritualists, heretics, scholars, scoundrels, devotees, rabbis, persons of quality and men of low estate—men and women as multiform as nature and society has made them. He has found and studied humanity, not only in English towns and villages, in the glare of gaslight and under the open sky, but on the Roman Campagna, in Venetian Gondolas, in Florentine streets, on the Boulevards of Paris and the Pardo of Madrid, in the snow-bound forests of Russia, beneath the palms of Persia and upon Egyptian sands, on the coast of Normandy and the salt plains of Brittany, among Druses and Arabs and Syrians, in the brand-new Boston and amidst the ruins of Thebes. But this infinite variety has little in it of mere historic or social curiosity. I do not think Browning has ever set himself the task of recording the legend of the ages, though to some extent he has done it. The instinct of the poet seizes on a type of character, the eye of painter perceives the shades and shapes of line and colour and form required to give it picturesque prominence, and the learning of the scholar than sets up a fragment of the broken past, or re-fashion a portion of the living present, as an appropriate and harmonious



scene or backgrounds. The statue is never dwarfed by the pedestal”.

It is a speciality with Browning that he is more concerned with portraying imperfect and ugly characters than perfect and noble, that he loved nothing more than the utterance of large and noble truths by the lips of mean and grotesque human being. In this connection Symons has observed : “In Browning’s poetry praise and wisdom were preferred not only out of the mouths of babes and sucklings but out of the mouths of swindlers and snobs. His knaves have a uniform tendency to theism. These loose and mean characters speak of many things feverishly and vaguely : of one thing they always speak with confidence and composure—their relation to God. It may seem strange at first sight that those who outlived indulgence, and not only every law, but of very reasonable anarchy, should still rely so simply upon the indulgence of divine perfection. Thus Sludge is certain that his life of lies and conjuring tricks has been conducted in a deep and subtle obedience to the message really conveyed by the conditions created by God. Thus Bishop Blougram is certain that his life of panicstricken and tottering compromise has been really justified as the only method that could unite him with God. Everyone of these mean swindlers, while admitting a failure in all things relative, claims an awful alliance with the Absolute. To mankind it will at first sight appear a dangerous doctrine indeed. But in truth, it is a most solid and noble and salutary doctrine, for less dangerous than its opposite. Every one on this earth should believe, amid whatever madness or normal failure, that his life and temperament have some object on the earth. Everyone on the earth should believe that he has something to give to the world which cannot otherwise be given. Everyone, should, for the good of men and the saving of his own soul, believe that it is possible, even if we are the enemies of the human race, to be the friends of God. The evil wrought by this mystical pride, great as it often is, is like a straw to the evil wrought by a materialistic self-abandonment. The crimes of the devil who thinks himself of immeasurable value are as nothing to the crimes of the devil who thinks himself of no value. With Browning’s knaves we have always this eternal interest, that they are real somewhere, and may at any moment speak poetry.



We are talking to a peevish and garreulous speak ; we are watching the play of his paultry features, his evasive eyes and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God uttering his everlasting soliloquy”.

Some critics have complained that Browning's characters are all alike and they are mere shadows of his own personality. Symons replies to this objection thus : “There is another popular misconception to which also a word in passing may as well be devoted. This is the idea that Browning's personality is apt to get confused with his characters, that his men and women are not separate creations, projected from his brain into an independent existence, but mere masks or puppets through whose mouths he speaks. This fallacy arises from the fact that not a few of his imaginary persons express themselves in a somewhat similar fashion ; or as people too rashly say ‘talk like Browning’. The explanation of this apparent paradox so far as it exists, is not far to seek. All art is a compromise, and all dramatic speech is in fact impossible. No persons in real life, would talk as Shakespeare or any other great dramatist makes them talk. Nor do the characters of Shakespeare talk like those of any other great dramatist, except in so far as later playwrights have consciously imitated Shakespeare. Every dramatic writer has his own style, and in this style, subject to modification, all his characters speak. Just as a soul, born out of eternity into time, takes on itself the impress of earth and the manners of human life, so a dramatic creation, pure essence in the shaping imagination of the poet, takes on itself in its passage into life, something of the impress of its abode. ‘The poet, in short, endows his creations with his own attributes ; he enables them to utter their feelings as if they themselves were poets, thus giving a true voice even to that intensity of passion which in real life often hinders expression’. If this fact is recognised—that dramatic speech is not real speech, but poetical speech infused with the individual style of each individual dramatist, modulated, indeed, but true to one keynote—then it must be granted that Browning has as much right to his own style as other dramatists have to theirs, and as little right as they to be accused on that account of putting his personality into his work. But as Browning's style is very pronounced and original, it is



more easily recognisable than that of most dramatists—so far no doubt, defect—and for this reason it has come to seem relatively more prominent than it really is. This consideration, and not any confusion of identity is the cause of whatever similarity of speech exists between Browning and his characters, or between individual characters. The similarity is only skin-deep. Take a convenient instance, *The King and the Book*. I have often seen it stated that the nine tellings of the story are all told in the same style, that all the speakers—Guide and Pompilia the Pope and *Tertium Quid* alike—speak like Browning. I cannot see it. On the contrary, I have been astonished, in reading the poem, at the variety, the difference, the wonderful individuality in each speaker's way of telling the same story—at the profound art with which the rhythm the metaphors, the very details of language, no less than the broad distinctions of character and the subtle indications of bias, are adapted and converted into harmony. A certain general style, a certain general manner of expression, are common to all, as is also the case in, let us say, *The Tempest*. But what distinctions, what variation of tone, what delicacy and expressiveness of modulation? As a simple matter of fact, few writers have ever had a greater flexibility of style than Browning."

## 9. Browning's Philosophy

Browning is one of those great English poets who have given a concrete synthesis of life, a creative and constructive line of thinking and above all a deep and profound philosophy of life grounded in optimism and faith. All his life Browning was a thinker. He conceived certain philosophical ideas about God, soul, man, life etc., and sought to embody them in his poetry. He did not formulate any systematic philosophy of life. He did not belong to any particular category of philosophers, nor did he make any strenuous attempt to propound a philosophy of life to be pursued and followed by his disciples. All that we can say is that in his poetry we come across philosophical ideas that move us to intellectual thinking and make us better than that we are.

In estimating Browning's philosophy of life we have to bear in mind that he treated certain elements as axiomatic. He harboured no doubts about certain of his philosophical conception and took them for granted. He was not prepared to enter into



any arguments about the veracity of certain of his philosophical thoughts and ideas.

Browning took for granted the existence and supremacy of God as the creator and governor of the universe, and was not prepared to doubt the existence of God even for a moment. He considered God as an all prevailing Deity, an essence always partially but never wholly revealed in the creative energy of Nature and the aspirations of man. Pauline's lover says ; 'I saw God everywhere—I felt presence.' Paracelsus declares his faith in the Supreme Being which, in fact, is Browning's personal faith about God—

Thus he dwells in all  
From life's minute beginnings, at last To man  
and  
God is seen God  
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the  
cloud.

Browning did not conceive of God as a cruel and tyrannical being unmindful of the lot of the created universe, or a sinister intelligence bent on punishing mankind. He conceived of God as a benignant and sympathetic power helping men in their endeavours if they reposed faith in Him and His mercy.

God made all the creatures and gave them  
Our love and our fear  
We and they are His Children  
One family here.

The second principle that Browning took for granted is the immortality of the soul. He could never believe that death brings the end of the divine spark irradiating human life. God is the potter and the soul is the clay. Both of them endure for ever. This faith of the poet is expressed in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*

"Fool ? All that is at all,  
Lasts ever, past recall ;  
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure  
Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay  
endure"

Every thinker has to answer one significant question—what is the end and aim of life ? For what objective have we been sent to the universe ? Browning squarely faced this question. In *Paracelsus* he dealt with this problem. He considered that the



aim of life was to acquire Power and since the power of knowledge was the mightiest of all powers, to pursue it with ardour and enthusiasm. But soon he realised that more love for power, even for the power of knowledge, was not sufficient, unless it was accompanied with Love. Knowledge by itself was arid and barren unless it was joined with the force of love. As Young puts it "Knowledge, at first (as in Paracelsus) a glorious gift, afterwards lost its glamour in his eyes; so far from conceding that knowledge could serve as a channel to the Divine Mind he came to scorn it and ridicule it and belittle its capacity to deal even with the primary impressions of sense; such is the drift of those polemical poems, like *La Saisiaz* of his later years. *But love, which kindles and exalts both power and knowledge, he deems to be the quality by which man touches the infinite, the quality common to God and man*" Love allied with knowledge and power ought to be the main quest of the human soul. This conviction is set forth in the words—

"Love preceding power,  
And with much power, always much more love"

At another place, the poet reiterated his faith in the same doctrine by pointing out—

"O world, as God had made it, all is beauty  
And knowing this is Love, and Love is duty"

Browning believed that the world with all its glories and triumphs, its joys and fears, was a fitting place for man's actions and activities. Browning was not an ascetic who shunned the world, nor a cross gained man to regard the universe as a vale of sorrow and tears, "where to think is to be full of sorrow", "where beauty cannot hold its lustrous eyes, nor new love pine at them beyond tomorrow". He had a genuine interest in the world and human life, which he considered to be real and good. "He thought the world good because he had found so many things that were good in it—religion, the nation, the family, the social class". In *Fra Lippo Lippi* we are told that

"This world is no blot for us  
Nor blank, it means intensely, and means good"

Again in the same poem we have another statement, recognising the goodness of the world—

The world and life's too long to pass for a dream  
In *Saul* the poet says—



How good is man's life, the mere living, how fit to employ  
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy

Having clearly defined the goal and end of man's life, Browning examined whether it was possible for man to achieve success in the attainment of his ideals. He was confronted directly with the problem of Evil, for everytime man strove to realise perfection and complete success in his aspirations, he was baffled and discomfited by the overpowering force of Evil in the world which retarded man's progress. Browning as a philosophic poet, dealt with the problem of Evil vis-a-vis human life in which he was intensely interested. Browning was never disheartened by the presence and power of evil, but considered it necessary for the progress of man in his life. Evil checked man from attaining perfection and kept him imperfect. It was better that man struggled to achieve perfection but could not attain it, for perfection is stagnation and 'what's come to perfection perishes'. Hence Evil provided the necessary balancing force in life and saved man from reaching perfection. Evil was no doubt man's foe, but it was a foe without whose presence progress could not have been possible. Evil was, therefore, a condition of man's moral life, and his moral progress. Evil was as permanent as good and it was man's duty to fight and struggle against the forces of evil believing like *Abi Vogler* that

"There shall never be one lost good  
What was will live as before  
The evil is uull, is nought, is silence implying sound.  
What was good shall be good, with evil so much good  
more"

The presence of evil should not check man from aspiring for higher ideals. Man's ideals should always be higher than his grasp. He should march steadily onwards unmindful of evil keeping his eye on his unattainable ideals. In *Andrea Del Sarto* Browning emphasised the necessity of keeping high ideals in one's life—

"A man's reach must be above his grasp  
Else, what is an heaven for?"

Man must struggle and strive to come as close to the attainment of his ideals as possible. Man was sent for struggle and fight against heavy odds of life rather than for weak-kneed surrender before the majesty of difficulties. The poet inspired



his readers to fight and struggle rather than submit and yield.

“Strive and thrive, cry speed, fight on for ever”  
was Browning’s message. In *Rabbi Ben Ezra* he gave the advice

“Youth should strive through acts uncouth  
TOWARDS MAKING”

Further in the same poem he gave the exhortation —

“Then, welcome and rebuff  
That turns earth’s smoothless rough  
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go ?  
But our joys three parts pain,  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain  
Learn nor account the pang, dare, never grudge the  
throe’

Browning admonished the readers of his poetry to be warriors and fighters, strong and indomitable strugglers, never allowing thoughts of cowardice and cravenness to distract them from their chosen path of heroism and bravery. In the poem *The Statue and the Bust*, he condemned cowardice and reproached the two lovers for their lack of courage and enthusiasm in their love.

At this stage one would like to put the relevant question concerning the utility of a life of struggle, when in spite of man’s best efforts one was likely to fail and suffer miseries in life like the heroes of Hardy’s novels. Browning had a satisfactory answer to give to those who were scared of failures in their struggle. Firstly, a man was not judged by God by his actual attainments and successful records. Man was judged by God by his aspirations, his noble ideals, and his efforts to achieve success in his life. In God’s view success was not the yardstick to judge a man’s earthly life. A man who had failed in a noble struggle was likely to be placed on a higher pedestal in the kingdom of God as compared to the little man who aspired to gain little and succeeded in achieving that little in his life. This faith of the poet was voiced fervently in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* :

Not on the vulgar mass  
Called ‘work’ must sentence pass  
Things done, that took the eye and had the price  
But all, the world’s coarse thumb  
And finger failed to plumb



So passed in making up the main account,  
 All instincts immature  
 All purposes unsure  
 That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's  
 account.

Secondly failure on the earth was not in any way an object of dismay, for what we fail to achieve in the world, we might succeed in heaven after the end of our journey on the earth.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence  
 For the fulness of the days ?

Browning believed that on earth we have '*broken arc*', but in heaven there is '*the perfect round*'. Failure need not dishearten us. The lover in '*The Last Ride Together*' gives a spirited defence of failure in life.

"Fail I alone in words and deeds ?  
 Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?  
 Look at the end of work contrast  
 The petty done, the undone vast"

Life is a probation. Life follows life. Man's soul is immortal. Death need not terrify us. What man failed to achieve in this world would be attained by him in the next. That was Browning's faith and in *Grammarian's Funeral* he stated.

"Leave now in dogs and apes, Man has for ever"

Such is the optimistic philosophy of Browning. His optimism, as G. K. Chesterton has said "was not founded on any arguments for optimism, nor on opinion, but on life which was the work of God". "Unlike some spiritual voyagers in our literature, he never hugged the shore, but sailed for the open, loving the salt sting of the buffeting waves. A courageous soul, and a vigorous and vital comrade for those suffering from spiritual anaemia".  
 (Compton-Rickett)

### A critical Note on : Browning's Philosophy of Life.

"Browning has reasoned and philosophised in verse more than any English poet of equal gifts". To many the appeal of his poetry is more moral and ethical than imaginative. Throughout his career Browning held up the steady light of a hopeful and optimistic concept of life before the doubt-racked Victorians. He has tried to present a comprehensive picture of the ethical nature of man and his position in relation to the world. Some have tried to build up a systematic and consistent philoso-



phy of life from his poetry. They presume a deliberate and pre-conceived theory of life on the part of the poet, to illustrate which he has written his poems. That was never the case with Browning. "His thought may portrude gently through his poems but at his best, as in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* or *Abi Vogler* the thought of the poem is needful for its lyric utterance". In his greatest poems, like *Andrea Del Sarto* and *Gramscian's Funeral*, thought content is blended with imaginative poetic content.

Tennyson followed and reflected from year to year the opinions of his age. He passed from faith to doubt and back again to faith. Not so with Browning. His first poem, *Pauline* outlined his conception of man's relation to God, to the universe around him and to his fellow men and this faith was held unwaveringly till the end. He developed it and filled in the details but the scientific debate which shook Tennyson's faith had no affect on it. Tennyson presents no consistent view of Man or Nature or God. The prevailing trends of thought made him shift his ideas repeatedly. The inward struggle for a satisfactory faith prevented him from offering that robust and strong faith in humanity and God which is "Browning's noblest legacy to the wavering, faithless, pessimistic, godless and analysis-tormented world".

Browning is pre-eminently a poet of Hope and Faith. It was the natural result of the vigorous sanity of his moral outlook. Like a reasonable man he made the happiness which he did not find. His optimism did not proceed from the idealistic disregard of evil. But he was so realistically interested in life as it is and so passionately in love with existence that he could not help being an optimist. He felt that the visible order of things was a part of the larger designs which alone renders life intelligible. He believed that to every man who ever lived on earth was given the love and confidence of God.

Browning believed in the value of experience : that no experience is wasted and that all life is good in its way. To creative purpose—God fulfils itself equally through evil and good. Browning never shrank from the contemplation of ugliness and evil. Evil is a condition necessary for good : it has its own place in the general design of life.

Browning believes in a future life. This idea is present in several poems. *The Last Ride Together*—



Still one must live a life beyond,  
Have bliss to die with  
In *Gammarian's Funeral* we are told it is  
God's task to make the heavenly period  
Perfect the earthen.  
In *By The Fireside* he refers to  
the house not made with hands.

The confidence of meeting his wife again after death animates the noble lyric *Prospice*. Browning believes that the present earthly life is a probation for the life to come in 'the house not made with hands'. This life is a trial and a test, the rehearsal for the performance in a future world, and "things rarely go smooth at a rehearsal". Browning clearly rejected the idea advanced by the new Science and sometimes accepted by Tennyson that death means total annihilation and end of personal consciousness and that the world is a result of the working of blind force. He believes that there is a purpose behind the universe. The flesh may be frayed by trials but the light of the soul shall shine all the more brightly.

All labour, yet no less  
Bear up beneath, their unsuccess.

In the choice between sense and spirit, between the noble and the less high, lies the test of the soul. Earth, with its failures and despairs, is the best training ground for man. Better its trials and crosses than a sterile uniformity of happiness.

Life is—to wake not sleep,  
Rise and not rest, but press  
From earth's level where blindly creep  
Things perfected, more or less.  
To the heaven's height, far and steep.

Not only did Browning consider this life a rehearsal or probation he looked at it as a battlefield. But life is a battle in which the final issue cannot be determined here, for

Who knows what is fit for us ?

What appears as defeat may contain the seeds of an ultimate triumph. In the *Grammarians' Funeral* we are told that high aims though unattained are more worth than complete attainment of a hundred lower aims. This is the faith with which the dead scholar's disciples bear their master to an eminence of honour with confident song.



Limitations of life forbid the attainment of perfection :  
On earth the broken arcs

we are told in *Abi Vogler*. Nevertheless we must strive ceaselessly towards perfection : We should never be satisfied with the results that we have obtained : that is the way to stagnation. Andrea's failure is tragic precisely because he is contented with mere craftsmanship. Uncertainty is therefore necessary for spiritual advance. Finality in happiness is undesirable on the ground that it checks further progress.

Puritan though Browning's antecedents were as a thinker, he was not an ascetic. He does not disregard the delights of life. Pleasure, wisely used, may become food for the mind. The opposition between soul and flesh is condemned in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* :

Let us not always say  
Spite of the flesh today  
I strove, made-head, gained ground upon the whole  
As the bird wings and sings  
Let us cry "All good things"  
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps  
Soul.

Browning's faith reflects the Nordic strength of his character and the undaunting courage of his soul. In the midst of storms of doubt and disbelief, of mockery and denial, in religion Browning stood unshaken on the rock of faith : he said

I was ever a fighter, so one fight more.

## 10. Browning's Optimism

From the foregoing essay on Browning's philosophy we find that Browning was an incorrigible optimist in his outlook on life. He looked with scorn at the pessimistic school of poetry growing up all round him, and the decadents, with their belief that art was only a counting of autumn leaves. Once he declared : "Death, death, it is the harping on death that I despise so much. In fiction, in poetry, French as well as English, and I am took in American also, in art and literature, the shadow of death, call it what you will, despair, negation, indifference is upon us. But what fools who talk thus. You know as well as I, that death is life, just as our daily momentarily dying body is nonetheless alive, and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our churchyardy crape-like word for



change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. Never say I am dead". His wife wrote about him : "The more tired he has been, and the more he has exulted and been happy—no, nothing ever made him so happy before."

Browning does not say, with Tennyson :

Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;  
That nothing walks with aimless feet :  
That no one life shall be destroyed,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete.

No ; beautiful as this faith is, Browning's is stronger and his vision clearer. With him there is no Somehow ; but he shows us just how the ill tends to good, and we have not to wait till, the pile is completed ; but we see the Builder at work, putting into his Fabric the unlikely—looking 'rubbish' we too rashly thought would be cast aside.

Browning does not complain with Dryden that 'Life is all a cheat', nor ask plaintively with Gray 'Oh, what is life with ills encompassed round' ?. He laments not with Shakespeare that 'Life's but a walking shadow—a tale to be told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing, nor with other who said : 'Life is a weary interlude that leaves no epilogue but death' nor with him who grieved "The longer life, the greater choice of evil'. He calls it not 'a mist', 'a riddle', 'a shadow', 'a wind-swept meadow'. Nothing of all this in Browning, with him as in Fra Lippo Lippi :

The world and life's too big to pass for a dream

As in Saul :

How good is man's life, the mere living how fit to employ  
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy.  
I have lived, seen God's thro' a lifetime, and all was for  
best.

As in Rabbi Ben Ezra :

Perfect I call Thy plan :  
Thanks that I was a man.

As once more in Fra Lippo Lippi :

This world's no blot for us :  
No blank ; it means intensely ; the means good.



And as again in *The Guardians Angel* :

O World, as God has made it ? All is beauty  
And knowing this is love, and love is duty.

He goes to the morgue, and even there, contemplating the corpses of the poor wretches on the slabs, can exclaim, with his beautiful, healthy optimism :

My own hope is, a sun will pierce  
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;  
That, after Last, returns the First  
Though a wide compass round be fetched ;  
That what began best can't end worst,  
Not what God blessed once prove accurst.

And in the magnificent *Abt Volger* poem :

There shall never be one lost good ? what was shall live  
as before ;  
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;  
What was good, shall be good, for evil, so much good  
more ;  
On the earth the broken arc ; in heaven, a perfect  
round.

In *Rabbi Ben Ezra* Browning's healthy optimism is well exhibited in the touching lines.

What I aspired to be,  
And was not comforts me.

There are lives which succeed, though to outward seeming they may be miserable failures. It is the aspiration, which makes the man, as he tells us over and over again, nowhere more grandly than in *Saul* :

Saul, the mistake  
Saul, the failure, the ruins he seems now—and bid him  
awake  
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find  
himself set  
Clear and safe in new light and new life—a harmony set.  
“This not what man Does which exalts him, but what  
man would do ?

Our proper sphere is ever indicated by the direction and intensity of our aspirations and strivings. As plants in mines, that never see the sun, tend upwards towards the light, so the inner aim shows the true man.



Better have failed in the high aim as I,  
That vulgarly in the low aim succeed—

he says in the *Inn Album*. The same truth is emphasized in *Fifine at the Fair* :

I gather heart through just such conquests of the soul,  
Through evolution out of that which, on the whole  
Was rough, ungainly, partial accomplishment at best.

The world is very hard upon the failures, and seldom gives credit even for the working, however good, of the sum which does not come out right. But happy God does not judge after this manner :

All men strive, and who succeeds ?  
What hand and brain rest ever paired ?  
What heart alike conceived and dared ?  
What act proved all its thought had been ?  
What will but felt the fleshly screen ?

—*The Last Ride Together*.

We have the same idea in another form in the concluding lines of *A Grammarian's Funeral* :

That low man goes on adding one to one  
His hundreds soon hit :  
The high man, aiming at a million,  
Misses an unit.

For Browning our body and this earth are equally important as our soul and heaven. Thus he says :

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it  
bears fruit.

The first necessity of a man's soul is a 'body at his best' and the proper use of this life. Which is good :

How good to live and learn  
Earth being so good, would heaven seen best

—*The Last Ride Together*.

How good is man's life, and more living ? how fit to  
employ

All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy

And after this life, there is another life awaiting him, still more glorious. So death does not fill him with despair. He regards earthly life as a mere stage in a journey—a training ground and pupil's place—his grief is small at the living of it. 'I count', he says :



Life just a stuff

To try the soul's strength on, educe the man,

—*In a Balcony.*

So take and use thy work :

Amend what flaws may lurk.

What strains of the stuff, what warpings past the aim ?

My times be in thy hand ?

Perfect the cup as planned,

Let age approve of youth and death complete the same.

—*Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

## 11. Browning's Obscurity

Browning's poetry is difficult to understand unless we are prepared to follow his thought step by step with the help of a dictionary of allusions and references. The poet did not compose poems to pander to the lower tastes of some of his readers. He never intended to offer "such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar, or a game of dominoes to an idle man." His poetry is packed with thought and is presented in a style that defies analysis and understanding. Naturally Brownings poetry appeared obscure and bewildering to the readers of his time and the charge of obscurity has not yet been completely taken away even though we have advanced on the plain of thought and have an incisive brain to pierce through the hard skein of thought.

When 'Sordello' was published, the reading public found in this work, a monument of obscurity and diffuseness. Even Tennyson reached against the obscurity of the poem by making the statement that he only understood two lines of it—opening 'who will may hear Sordello's story told, and the final, 'who would have heard Sordello's story told' and that both these were lies. Carlyle reported that his wife had gone through *Sordello* without being able to make out whether Sordello was a man or a city or a book. Douglas Jarrod who had taken *Sordello* just to beguile his time after recovery from a prolonged illness soon put down the book in disgust and horror with the remark "My God ? I' am an idiot. My health is restored, but my mind's gone. I cant understand two consecutive lines of an English poem". All these reactions to *Sordello* clearly indicate that in his earlier works Browning was unintelligible to the majority of his readers. This obscurity did not leave the poets art inspite of all criticism, and all succesive works and dramatic-monologues had in them the same unintelligibility which characterised



*Pauline, Paracelsus* and *Sordello*. *The Ring and the Book* became a hard nut to crack and many readers left the study of this monumental work in sheer-despair.

It will be difficult to absolve poet of the charge of obscurity and unintelligibility through spirited defence for his art have been put forward by Symons, Swinburne, and G. K. Chesterton. We cannot claim thorough understanding of all his works even though we may read them attentively and with care, for in them 'more is meant than meets the eye'. Sometimes Browning himself failed to understand the meaning of a poem written by him at an early stage. Once a student went to the poet to explain his thought to him, for even with his best efforts he could not make out what he really meant. Browning read the poem but to his utter dismay he himself could neither make head nor tail of the poem. Quite jocularly he replied to the young boy, "When I wrote this poem, two persons knew the meaning of it, God and I. Now only one of them (God) knows it." Browning often forgot what he had written. E. V. Lucas in *The Calvins and their friends* narrates a very interesting incident of Browning's forgetfulness. 'I remember with what amused gusto he related only day how a lady friend had been reading him out certain verses, and now he had slapped his thigh (a very characteristic action by the way) and said, "By Jove, that's fine"; how then she had asked him who wrote them and he could not say; and how surprised he was when she told him they were his own.'

Let us now analyse and examine the reasons responsible for alleged obscurity of Browning. In the opinion of some readers Browning's obscurity was an act of deliberation. "It was a piece of intellectual vanity indulged in more and more insolently as his years increased". This charge has been refuted by G. K. Chesterton who states that Browning was never a victim of vanity. 'There is not an iota of evidence that he was intellectually vain'. He was meek and humble, and thought that his ideas were commonplace and could be easily followed by his readers. He thought that 'the whole street was humming with his ideas and that the postman and the tailor are poets like himself.' He gave expression to his thoughts in a language that came naturally to him hoping that he would be understood for he was expressing nothing new. To him his ideas were very clear. It came as a surprise to the poet that his ideas could not be



understood and properly appreciated. If Browning had been an intellectual snob as Byron was, he would have made efforts to make himself lucid just to show how intellectually superior he was to them in the realm of thought. But Browning was meek and humble and did not give particular aim to his thoughts. Thus in the opinion of G. K. Chesterton Browning's obscurity was the outcome of his 'humanity and inward charity'. "He was not unintelligible because he was proud" says G. K. Chesterton "but unintelligible because his thoughts were vogue, but because to him they were obvious."

The most obvious reason that can be pointed out for Browning's obscurity was the inability of his readers, fed on the clear and limpid poetry of Tennyson, to penetrate through the subtle, deep, and philosophical thoughts of the poet. The poet was an original thinker like Donne, and his reading was wide and stupendous. His mind was a store-house of ideas culled from a bewildering variety of sources ranging from the obscure authors of the Middle Ages, Renaissance period, and modern times. All that knowledge which Browning had amassed as a result of years of studious application was packed into his works. There were numerous allusions and references to obscure and little-read works. He assumed that everyone was familiar with those odds and ends of knowledge with which his head was full. "He presumed that everyone was fond of the odd, holes and corners of history as he". Browning's rich references and allusions appeared obscure to his readers, and they failed to understand what the poet was actually driving at.

Browning wrote with great rapidity and rush. The language at his command was a poor instrument to render effectively and with the same speed the thoughts and ideas that flashed through his mind. The rush and flow of ideas could not be cope by the language. Lest the ideas should slip away from the mind. Browning complexed and condensed them in as few words as possible. This condensation of thought was extremely baffling to his readers, and defied proper analysis and understanding. The average reader with an inferior mental equipment could not keep pace with the far too quick process of his subtle thoughts. In '*My Last Duchess*', the complicated and complex ideas of the poet are packed in close set fifty six lines. Many things are assumed and taken for granted by the poet. No introduction to his poems is given. Straightway the poet plun-



ges in the exposition of his thoughts without very much caring for the expression.

Added to this bane of condensation and quick thought was the faulty grammar of the poet. He never bothered about grammar. He made use of involved and clumsily constructed sentences. His habit of omitting relative words 'who' 'which' 'on' etc, was a serious handicap to the understanding of his poems. We have to insert the missing words in order to understand the construction e. g. "*You hold things beautiful the best*"

He followed the policy of suppressing words, with the result that many of his lines are elliptical to a fault, leaving out relatives, articles, prepositions and verbs. The diction of the poet presented its own difficulties. F. L. Lucas in *Ten Victorian Poets*, finds fault with Browning's language. "He is indeed one of those writers who treat language not as a musical instrument, needing delicacy no less than power in its handling, but rather as an iron bar which they are to twist and tangle in an exhibition of their prowess as professional strong men."

Browning's style posed certain difficulties. The grotesque rhymes, the involved syntax, the elliptical speech, the run on lines, had much to do with the unintelligibility of his poetry. He was unconventional in these matters. "His poems are a series of bewildering mental acrobatics expressed in a wilfully harsh rhythm and vocabulary (Albert) Dawson criticising Browning's style says "In his poetry Browning has put his subtlest and deepest thought and he uniformly puts a higher value on the thought than the method or manner of its expressions. With him the sense is more than the sound, the substance is more than the form, the moral significance is more than the rhetorical adornment. He has something to say, something of infinite moment and solemn import, and he is therefore comparatively careless of how he says it. He is the Carlyle of poetry : "the message is everything, the verbal vesture nothing". Routh in *Towards the Twentieth Century*, directs our attention to the mannerisms of Browning's style—"Browning rendered the exercise too difficult, he spoilt his manners by his mannerisms."

Browning need not terrify us if we approach him in the spirit of humility and devote ourselves to his study. Behind his so called obscurity, there is a richness of thought, as we will be amply repaid for the labour, if we study him with attention.



Browning's language is the fitting instrument for his philosophical thought. We should remember that his discourses on the problems of life and soul could not have been 'clothed in the language of a love song or the words that befit a hymn of daisy'. The language in which they have been couched is the proper and befitting vesture for them. After all as Berdoo says in '*Browning's message to His Time*', "Precious stones do sometimes want digging for. Diamonds and nuggets are not always to be stumbled across on the footpath. Pickaxes and crushing mills are not unknown in mining operations ; and the treasures of kings are kept in strong boxes. The bee cannot gather his honey from the simplest flower without contributing his quota to the process of fertilisation ; and the stimulation of our thinking faculties is no small part of the good which great teachers have to do for us. The quartz will pay for crushing, the diamond for digging".

## 12. Browning as a poet of Nature

A poet's attitude towards Nature gives us deeper clue to his imaginative quality and temperament. It is interesting, for example, that Shelley should have selected the Skylark for an ode and Keats the Nightingale. The Skylark, with its associations of morning, sunshine, joyous rapture of song and adventurous flight, is as symbolic of Shelley's poetic genius as is the nightingale, with its associations of night, darkness, melancholy and romantic sweetness, of Keats' genius. Wordsworth, on the other hand, prefers the homely stock dove. Browning's references are zoological indicating his liking for the quaint and the grotesque, for Nature's freaks rather than for beauties. If he tells us that 'lark's on the wing', he also immediately points out that the 'snail's on the thorn'. He was attracted more by frogs, toads, eels, snakes, jerboas, rats than in all the birds of song put together. Even his imagery sometimes originates with creeping creatures of nature:

'The water's in stripes, like a snake olive pale.

With immense relish he describes the otter 'black wet as a deech', or the jerboa "half-bird and half-mouse". In *The Pied Piper* he describes with great zest how the rats came out :

And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,  
You heard as if an army muttered :  
And the muttering grew to a grumbling :



And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling ;  
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling  
 Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,  
 Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,  
 Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,  
 Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,  
 Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,  
 Families by tens and dozens,  
 Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives  
 Followed the Piper for their lives,

The same partiality for the uncouth and unusual leads to violent images as when he compares a great cloud laden with light to 'a dead whale that white birds peck'. The love of bizarre and gothic can be detected also in the scenic background of *Childe Roland*. All this is deliberate. When he likes he can equal Tennyson in a line of haunting beauty :

Night has its first, supreme, forsaken star

or

Hark to the wind with its wants and infinite wail.

A vivid colour sense is a marked characteristic of Browning's Nature poetry. He had no liking for delicate light colours. His landscapes are bathed in sharp colours, e. g. ; the opening to *Pippa passes* :

Day ?

Faster and more fast ?

O'er night's brim, day boils at last :

Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud cup's brim,

Here is another morning :

Morning just up, higher and higher runs

A child barefoot and rosy.

Probably Browning's long residence in Italy accentuated his love of colour. He sees the great red bell of the tulip, the purple fire of sunrise, the dark crimson of the poppies, 'the rose-flesh mushrooms', and a hundred other 'passionate seizures of colour' :

That crimson the creeper's leaf across

Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,

O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss.

There is very little of the nature of English countryside in Browning's poetry. In the whole of his poetry there are



only three references to English scenery, as Brooke points out. The first occurs in *Pauline*, the second in *Oh to be in England* and the third in *Inn Album*. His imagination was curiously held by one kind of landscape : a ravine with overhanging trees and thin thread of water, looping itself round the rocks. It occurs in *By the Fireside* and in other poems as well. He seldom invented his landscapes. He generally drew from the store of his memories of the European scenery.

With a few exceptions, Browning's landscapes are generally Italian. They have the grandeur and colour of Italian landscapes. In *Grammarian's Funeral* he has produced the effect of widening of the landscape as the mountain is climbed. *The Fight of The Duchess* brings before us, at great length, league after league of ever-widening landscape.

In Browning there was little of the spiritual contemplation of Nature. Wordsworth makes the Soul of Nature sympathise with Man's Soul. Browning emphasises her aloofness from man. In *By The Fireside* the atmosphere of nature unites the two hearts and :

Their work was done—we might go or stay  
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

Nature is not dead matter to Browning. She is alive but does not reflect our passions. In Tennyson she is not alive but reflects human moods. Browning is capable of describing nature, accurately and vividly as she is without adding human sentiment to her. Nevertheless he cares little for her apart from man. He uses her only as a background to human life. Of that Joy in Nature for her own sake which was felt by almost all the Romantics, there is rarely any touch in Browning. *By The Fireside* shows this. "No description can be better, more close, more observed, than of the walk over the hill, but it is mere scenery for the lovers". Browning loves the beauty and splendour of Nature. Seldom does he establish any mystic union with her. Not that he was unaware of the decisive, but kindly, influence that Nature can exert. The lover in *By The Fireside* was finding it impossible to express what he felt

Till the trouble grew and stirred  
and Nature affected the union of hearts :

The forests had done it ; there they stood ;  
We caught for a moment the powers at play ;



They had mingled us so, for once and good.

But Browning does not often speak of this aspect of Nature.

Nature has thus a place in the world of Browning's poetry but it is not in Nature that he finds the fullest inspiration. "... he is happiest when he can turn towards civilisation, to crowds and to lighted streets and the sound of human voices". In his later work interest in human nature pushed out his interest in Nature till she become almost non-existent.

### 13. Browning's Realism

Browning was born in the after blow of the Revolution, and he grew up with the growing fame of Shelley and Keats. In his early years he had great affinity with the Romantics, but gradually he broke with the Romantic tradition, and turned more and more towards realism. Herford is of the opinion that Browning while romantic temper, was, in comparison with his predecessors, a thorough realist in method. In his book, *Robert Browning*, he has observed: "Browning once wrote to Miss Haworth, 'I have, you are to know, such a love for flowers and leaves that I every now and then in an impatience at being unable to possess them thoroughly, to see them quite, insatiable myself with their scent—bite them to bits'. He wrote some twenty years later to Ruskin 'Poetry is the problem of putting the infinite into the finite'. Utterances like these, not conveyed through the lips of some 'dramatic' creation but written seriously in his own person to intimate friends, give us a clue more valuable it may be than some other utterances which are oftener quoted and better known to the germinal impulses of Browning's poetic work. 'Finite' and 'infinite' were words continually on his lips, and it is clear that both sides of the antithesis represented instincts rooted in his mental nature, drawing nourishment from distinct, but equally fundamental springs of feeling and thought. Each had its stronghold in the particular psychical region. The province and feeding ground of his passion for 'infinity' was that eager and restless self-consciousness which he so vividly described in *Pauline*, seeking to 'be all, have, see, know, taste, feel all', to become all natures, *Sordello*, yet retain the law of his own being. 'I pluck the rose and love it more than tongue can speak' says the lover in *Two in Campagna*. Browning had his full share of the romantic idealism which, under the two-fold stimulus of literary and political revolution, had animated the poetry of the previous generation. But while he clearly shared the



unlifted aspiring spirit of Shelley, it assumed in him a totally different character. Shelley abhors limits, everything grows evanescent and ethereal before his solvent imagination ; the infinity he aspires after unveils itself at the bidding, impalpable, undefined, 'intense', 'inane'. Whereas Browning's restlessly aspiring temperament worked under the control of an eye and ear that fastened with peculiar emphasis and eagerness upon all the dissonances, the angularities that Shelley's harmonising fancy dissolved away. Hence it is literally true to say that, for Browning the infinite' is not the rival of the antithesis, but the very language of the 'finite' that the vastest and most transcendent realities have for him their points d' appui in some bit of intense life, some darting bird or insect, some glowing flower or leaf.

Hence Browning, while a romantic in temper was, in comparison with his predecessors a thorough realist in method. All the Romantic poets of the previous generation had refused some large portion of reality. Wordsworth had averted his ken from half human fate ; Keats and Shelley turned from the forlornness of human society as it was the transfigured humanity of myth. All three were out of sympathy with civilisation, their revolt went much deeper than a distaste for the types of men in bred. They tatakced a triumphant age of reason in its central fastness, the brilliant analytic intelligence to which its triumphs were apparently due. Keats declaimed at cold philosophy which undid the rainbow's spells ; Shelley repelled the claim of mere understanding to settle the merits of poetry ; Wordsworth, the profoundest though by no means the most cogent and connected, thinker of the three, denounced the 'meddling intellect' which murders to dissect, and strove to strip language itself of every element of logic and fancy, as distortions of the truth, only to be uttered in the barest words, which comes to the heart that watches and receives. On all these issues Browning stands in sharp contrast, if not quite absolute, contrast. 'Barbarian', as he has been called and as in quite intelligible sense he was, he found his poetry pre-eminently among the pursuits, the passions, the interest and problems, of civilised men. His potent gift of imagination never tempted him, during his creative years to assail the sufficiency of intellect, or to disparage the intellectual and 'artificial' elements of speech ; on the contrary, he appears from the outset employing in the service of poetry a discursive logic of unsurpassed swiftness and dexterity, and a vast heterogeneous



army of words gathered, like a sudden levy, with a sole eye to their effective force, from every corner of civilised life, and wearing the motley of the most prosaic occupation. It was only in the closing years that he began to distrust the power of thought to get a grip upon reality. His delight to poetic argument is often doubtless that of the ideas was a rooted passion that gave a thoroughly new and to many readers most unwelcome, 'intellectuality' to the whole manner as well as substance of his poetic work.

"Browning, though a plantonist, maintained on the whole the attitude of the utilitarian man of facts. He agreed with Elizabeth Barret that 'Fairy-poetry was impossible in the days of steam'. His imagination worked freely only when it bodied forth a life in accord with the waking experience of his own day. 'A poet never dreams, said his philosophic Don Juan, 'we prose folk always do' and the epigram brilliantly announced the character of Browning's poetic world—the world of prose illuminated through and through in every cranny and crevice by the keenest and most exploring of intellects".

#### 14. Browning's Relation with his Age

Whereas Tennyson was the respective poet of his age. Browning stood aloof from it. In this connection Young has observed : Browning's busy intellectual curiosity and vivid interest in men were allied with a singular aloofness from the movements and revolutions of his time, he was born in 1882, so that in the year of the Reform Bill he has 20 years of age, but scarcely a note in his writings indicates that this forceful irruption of democracy—or any of the later extensions of franchise—exercised a formative influence over his mind. His poetry is equally free from speculation upon the effects of Irish policy, the Corn Laws, the Factory Acts, Chartism the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, and the process of commercial expansion between 1830 and 1840. These developments left a deep impression on Tennyson's mind and coloured his prognostication of man's destiny ; 'the ringing grooves of change' have their terminus, as in were, at 'the Parliament of Man', 'the federation of the World'. While Tennyson's mind was impregnated with much of the disquiet and incertitude of his time, through which he slowly won his way to a faith in some orderly consummation, Browning's mind was impervious to doubt and his confidence in the value of life was constitutionally unshakable, if meant intensely and men as good'. His creed



carried him buoyant over waves which threatened to engulf the cultured spirit of Tennyson.

England plays an insignificant part in his work ; a reference or two, in *Home-Thought from the Sea* and *Nationality in Drinks* are not enough to constitute him a patriotic poet. Political movements were to Browning simply backgrounds upon which the individual was the more sharply silhouetted, and abstract ideals had little meaning for his poetry until they were focussed in a concrete human personality. This in fact was one of the two ways in which the poet did lie open to the influence of his epoch. He would analyse the mingled hypocrisy, self-deception and sincerity of such a product of his time as *Blougram*, with unflagging, often unpoetic, zest ; but he was in the main indifferent to the abstract issues of tractarianism, rationalism and materialism.

Greek endings with the little passing-bell  
That signify some faith's about to die

The patriot is an imagined incident for which his immediate observation of the Italian struggle provided the basis. But neither this nor *The Italian in England* suggests anything of the range and scope which exalt Meredith's *Sandra Belloni* and *Vittoria* into veritable epics. These poems portray loyalty in three splendid instances, but they are only incidentally concerned with the fortunes of Austria and Italy. *The Ring and the Book* has its scene in Rome and Arezzo, but it is a story of 1689, not of the nineteenth century. And though the broader aspects of religion interested him more than any other generalisation, yet what lingers in the memory from the reading of the *Zion Chapel Meeting House*, but the oddly assorted and indelibly delineated congregation which assembles within it :

The fat weary woman  
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping  
Her umbrella with a mighty report  
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,  
A wretch of whale bones :

and

the many tattered  
Little old-faced, peaking sister-turned-mother  
Of the sickly babe.

An aspect of life did not become the more significant or arresting to him because it touched a large encourse of humanity.



He preferred the microcosm of individual character where all the elements of life are blended, to the numerous assembly where aspirations are rife which exaggerate and distend some separate future to the detriment of proportion in the whole.

There was second fashion in which Browning was indebted to his time. Wherever contemporary thought attained some new height and shed illumination over some dark province of the mind, the poet gave heed. In philosophy and science such conceptions emerged. He stoutly professed his ignorance of the German philosophers and of their English evangelists, Coleridge and Carlyle. Nevertheless his theory of life would topple to disaster if it were deprived of its foundations of Idealism which enabled him to interpret the universe in terms of the mind, to rout the scepticism and despair which are the concomitants of materialistic philosophy, to admit evil and misery as the necessary counterparts in thought of good and happiness.

In science the aspect of the evolutionary doctrine which coordinated and classified and so elucidated the disordered multitude of facts touched him far less than which asserted the continuity and progress of all existence. When he said that the essential principles of Darwinism had been familiar to him for years, he was rather indifferent to the application of this conception to the physical universe, for that in its full implication it was entirely novel. He scoffed at the pretensions of science to explain the moral emotions on natural grounds.

Suppose a pricking to incontinence—  
 Philosophers deduce your chastity  
 Or shame from just the fact that at first  
 Whoso embraced a woman in the plain,  
 Threw club down, and forewent his brains beside,  
 So stood a ready victim in the reach  
 Of any brother-savage club in hand—  
 Hence saw the use of going out sight  
 In wood or cave to prosecute his loves  
 I read this in a French book t' other day

(*Bishop Blougram's Apology*)

In fact therefore although the idea of development pervades all his poems which are not purely lyrical, yet its main incidence was for him in the spiritual world. There it sanctions and encourages man in his endeavour to fulfil the dictates of his best ideals. So powerful and ingredient of his thought is it



that even the oriental fatalistic emblem of the Potter and the Clay glows with the energy of the strife towards perfection. In the sense we are justified in regarding Rabbi Ben Ezra as a poem of spiritual evolution.

It was not through any disability to apprehend the characteristic of an age that he stood apart from the currents of his own. On the contrary one of his most remarkable powers was that of suggesting the temper and fashion of a whole period of history. Of the Middle Ages to some extent, and of the Italian Renaissance without qualification, he is one of our most trustworthy interpreters ; witness for instance the representation of the hideous heresy in *The Heretic's Tragedy*, the equipage and conduct of the ordeal by joust in *Count Gismond*, and the gentle piety and venomous spite, vividly contrasted products of the monastic system in *The Spanish Cloister*. The earlier and more exalted spirit of the Renaissance is typified in *A Grammarian's Funeral* ; its later and more sophisticated outcome in *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*. So too poems of Florence, Andrea and Fra Lippo chief among are them an epitome the city's artistic life at the zenith of its fame.

### 15. Comparison between Tennyson and Browning

Tennyson and Browning were the two great poets of Victorian Age. They widely differed from each other in their aims and ideals as poets. There were more points of contrast than similarity between these two poets. "There could scarcely be two characters, two musics, two methods in art, two imaginations more distinct and contrasted than those which lodged in these men".

(Stopford A. Brooke)

(1) Tennyson was the representative poet of the Victorian Age. He was the national bard and his work reflects the tendencies and fundamental problems agitating the minds of the men of his age. The social, political, economic and religious problems of the age were represented by Tennyson in his poetry. Browning kept himself completely aloof from the social, religious and political problems of his times. His poems do not indicate any interest in Victorian problems. "Browning did not much love to work on topics connected with his own generation. To him, time was a matter almost of indifference ; for the human soul, in which his interest was centred, has remained much the same since the days of Adam".

(Hugh Walker).



(2) Tennyson was an English man out and out. He was a patriot and expressed in his poetry his love for his Country. He considered the foreigners as devils. His outlook was narrow and insular. Browning on the other hand was a cosmopolitan poet, and one comes across very few references to England in his poetry. He was more interested in Italy than in England.

(3) Tennyson under the influence of the romantic revival, chose his subjects daintily, but 'all's fish that came to Browning's net.' He was interested not only in beautiful and comely subjects, but also in ugly, grotesque and bizarre themes. His aim was to exhibit the flight of truth hidden in both the evil and the good.

(4) Tennyson was a greater artist than Browning, and Browning a greater thinker than Tennyson. Artistic qualities predominated in Tennyson's poetry, intellectual qualities in Browning.

(5) Tennyson aimed at lucidity and clarity of expression. His art did not form obscurity and formlessness. Browning sacrificed lucidity and clarity at the altar of thought. His poetry was marked with obscurity, and people failed to understand his thoughts.

(6) Both Tennyson and Browning were teachers. They shared the Victorian zest for moral preaching. The mantle of Elijah was thrown upon them. Tennyson was first an artist and then the teacher; "but with Browning the message was always the more important thing and he was careless, too careless, of the form in which it was expressed."

(7) "The two poets differ more widely in their respective messages. Tennyson's message reflects the growing order of the age, and is summed up in the 'Law'. In his view the individual will must be suppressed; the self must always be subordinate. Browning's message on the other hand is the triumph of the individual will over all obstacles; the self is not subordinate but supreme."

(8) Tennyson wavered in his faith. He had to pass through pessimism to optimism. His wavering thoughts about life and its mission are expressed in *Lotus Eaters* and *Ulysses*, Browning never allowed a grain of pessimism to cross his philosophy. He was buoyant and hopeful optimist all through his life. "Tennyson's resignation is at times oriental in its fatalism and



occasionally it suggests Schopenhauer in its mixture of fate and pessimism. There is nothing oriental, nothing doubtful, nothing pessimistic in the whole range of Browning's poetry. He is the voice of the Anglo-Saxon standing in the face of all obstacles and saying "I can and I will."

(9) Both Tennyson and Browning attempted dramas for the stage, but unfortunately could not achieve success in their enterprise. They failed as stage-dramatists. In spite of their failure, Browning had a greater dramatic genius than Tennyson. His dramatic monologue is the triumph of his dramatic power. Tennyson could not achieve the same success as Browning in the handling of the dramatic monologue. The dramatic monologue was Tennyson's occasional achievement.

(10) Tennyson was interested only in English characters. His human beings are all drawn from English life. The *English Idylls* of Tennyson reflect the ideals of the widely different types of English life. His men and women were English men and English women. Browning's interest in men and women was wider and comprehensive. He was almost Shakespearean in his sweep and grasp of human character. Browning studied the 'Soul' of several of his characters with great minuteness. His main emphasis was on the 'incidents in the development of a soul'. Tennyson could not dissect the human soul as minutely as Browning. He was not a subtle-souled psychologist as Browning.

(11) Both Tennyson and Browning were interested in religion. They believed in God and immortality of the soul. Tennyson's religious poems do not have the same sweep as that of Browning's. Tennyson's faith in the Christian religion and the triumph of Christ's love was more a matter of faith and hope. Browning, on the other hand, made a reasoned ground for the triumph of faith and the love of God in *Epistle of Karshish* and *Bishop Blougram's Apology*.

(12) Tennyson was interested in the Middle Ages and devoted the '*Idylls of the King*' to King Arthur and Round Table. Browning's interest was not all in the Middle Ages. Hugh Walker says, "The Middle Ages proper make but slight appeal to Browning. Instead of representing Browning as a master of the lore of the Middle Ages, it seems more consistent with the facts to say that no man of his time was more completely free from their influence."



(13) "Tennyson is full of echoes from the classics ; but though Browning knew all the Greek and Latin poets, there are few lines or phrases in his works which can be traced back to them. His method of conception was essentially his own, and his work did not readily amalgamate with the works of others. The echoes of Shelley in his early poetry seem not quite in keeping with the context. He felt the incongruity, and early learnt to rely upon himself alone." (Hugh Walker).

(14) Tennyson's treatment of love was from the standpoint of a spiritualist who sought to glorify married love rather than the tumult of passion. Browning, besides giving to love a higher place in life, did not feel shy of representing the love of sexes. He explored the eddies and whirlpools of human love in his successful as well as unsuccessful poems of love.

(15) Both Tennyson and Browning were poets of nature, and subordinated Nature to human life. But even in their approach to Nature they were different. "In Tennyson the human figures matter less than the landscape, but in Browning the exact reverse is true—the world of nature matters less to him than human beings. It forms only the background of his portraits ; indeed it often becomes itself humanised. His hills lie like giants watching a hunted beast at bay, their chins upon their hands ; his trees cluster round a lake as wild men round a sleeping girl, or gaze at the sun setting in the cloudy west, as a girl after her lover. His forests for an instant relax their ancient aloofness to make two human beings one" (F.L. Lucas).

(16) In their styles Tennyson was more refined, clear and limpid than Browning, who sacrificed melody and clarity for the excellence of his thoughts. Browning's style "Instead of being electric and carefully elaborated, was highly individual, often more intent on meaning than on form." (Moody-Lovett). Tennyson's style was polished and gem-like in decoration, but Browning "left his hastily scribbled poems as fuzzy and prickly and tangled as a furzebush (F. Lucas).

It was a good omen for English literature that the two leaders in poetry differed from one another so widely : it could not be a bad omen that while the one was fervidly patriotic ; the other was frankly cosmopolitan" (Hugh Walker).



### A critical Note on : The poetry of the earlier 19th century

The accident of death makes a break in poetry about the year 1830 : Keats died in 1821, Shelley in 1822, Byron in 1824, and Coleridge and Wordsworth were poetically 'dead' by 1830. A new poetry came with Tennyson and Browning, though readers at the time were slow to recognise it. The popular poets in 1830 were still Scott and Byron and others who catered for similar tastes : Samuel Rogers with his *Italy*, Thomas Moor with his Irish lyrics, and with the incredibly popular Eastern romance of *Lalla Rookh*, and Thomas Cambell, who in many ways was a more genuine poet than either of the others. Among minor poets John Clare (1793-1864), a self-taught farmer poet, published a series of volumes beginning with *poems, Descriptive of Rural life* (1820). Interest was re-awakened in his verse in the twentieth century by Edmund Blunden's edition in 1930 of the autobiography of his tormented life.

The twentieth century has also retained an affection for Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-49), whose death's Feast Book (1825 often revised), a play in the Elizabethan manner, has some memorable lyrics.

The tradition of Scott and Byron, as it was understood in 1830, was one of poetry made easy. Tennyson and Browning were to restore to poetry something of a higher function. Though Tennyson can be charged with sometimes having one eye on the audience and, after he was made Laureate, with having both eyes on the Queen. They both succeeded in retaining a large audience for poetry in an age when the novel had become the popular form of literature.

Tennyson (1809-92) has been so much abused in the generations after his death that it is well to attempt to see his performance with justice.

No one has denied him a most perfect control of the sound of English, an inpeccable ear, and a consummate choice and taste in words. Indeed, his early lyrics seem to exist only to weave patterns of words, like tapestries or to create tunes and verbal rhythms, delicate and faultless. The charge could be made that the words were too good for the meaning which they contained.



Compared with any one of his predecessors in the Romantic period, he lacked originality and depth, and many of the poems in the volumes of 1830 and 1833 have a certain vacuity. The charge would equally just if made against the *Poems of 1842*, for here in poems such as 'Ulysses' he combined all his early felicity with a theme symbolising the romantic conception of the heroic spirit.

Tennyson's genius lay in the lyric and the short poem, 'Oenone', 'The dream of Fair Women' or 'The Palace of Art,' but his ambition called him forth to a longer and more ambitious work. Thus he occupied himself at intervals throughout his career with the *Idylls*, his Arthurian poems, picturesque, romantic, but allegorical and didactic as well. The *Idylls* have many virtues, to hear again isolated passages is to recall how sensitive was Tennyson's ear, how fastidious his taste. Yet once one remembers Chaucer or Spencer or Donne, the virtues of the *Idylls* seem unimportant. Tennyson has reduced the plan of the Arthurian stories to the necessities of Victorian morality. He has failed to look upon his own age with unbashed, far seeing eyes. The vision of life itself he has rejected and instead made these faultless verses, melodious, decorative and, judged by the great standards, false. The *Idylls* are ultimately the poem of the Laureate; *In Memoriam* is the poem of the poet himself, and, since it is so genuinely his, it becomes at the same time the great poem of his age. He records the death of his friend Arthur Hallam and his thoughts on the problems of life and death, his religious anxieties, and his hard-own faith in an eternal life.

The rather fretful mystic, the child before God, terrified of this Universe, and distrust full of the growing evidence of science, the infant crying for Divine guidance, such is the poet of *In Memoriam*, and the portrait, if not always attractive, is ever truthful.

Tennyson commanded a very wide audience and his imitators were numerous. It was not unnatural, then that opposition to his verse should grow, and it has persisted from his lifetime to this day, though it could be urged that he was more esteemed in the fifties than in the thirties. He had made poetry the description of a beautiful and antique world, as if deliberately he was closing his eyes to the ugly industrialism of his own century. Poetry, conceived in this way, would not be an interpretation of life, but a charmed and distant illusion.



Often Tennyson himself seems to have been aware of the danger, and 'Locksley Hall' and *The Princess* and 'Maud' touch upon his own time. Unfortunately, the mind which he brought to these problems was often dulled, and 'Locksley Hall' shows that he could be deluded by the mirage of progress which the material prosperity of the nineteenth century seemed to offer.

*In Memoriam* alone goes farther and gives not the voice of the preacher, but vision, and the strange anomaly is that while the preacher's voice was commanding and resonant, the voice of the vision was like the voice of a little child.

The moral and religious problems which occupied Tennyson are the main theme of Robert Browning (1812-89). His work suffered in the twenties and the thirties a period of disparaging criticism and indeed there was a time when he was better known for his rescue of Elizabeth Barrett (1806-61) from Wimpole Street than as a poet.

Of that event only two things need be said. First, the lady herself was a poet in her own right, as her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and *Aurora Leigh*, which just misses real greatness, amply show, and in their early married years she was for more popular as a poet than Browning. Secondly, Browning in his elopement had, as usual, all the luck.

If only Elizabeth had died on that flight to the continent, Browning would have been the ogre of the piece instead of the romantic hero. This must be remembered, for it may in part explain why he believed so optimistically that every thing in life did ultimately turn out well. Even in the years when his verse was discounted he always had vigorous supporters, some of the unexpected ones such as Ezra Pound, and by his middle of the twentieth century his poetry was once again much esteemed.

In pursuing his study of the human mind, Browning drew upon wide and unusual reading, which easily baffled the reader by the remoteness of its references. Already in *Sordello* (1840) he had employed a knowledge of medieval Italy with an allusiveness which no reader could hope to follow. He had developed also an independence of style, with an assumption of unusual rhythms, grotesque rhymes, and abrupt, broken phrasing. At its best this gave to his verses a virility which contrasts pleasantly with



the over-melodious movement of much nineteenth-century poetry. That he was a master of verse can be seen from the easy movements of his lyrics, but his special effects, though they gave realism to his poems, were in danger of becoming a mannerism.

The appearance of realism through a medium which was dramatic was what he must attempted to attain. In drama itself he was only moderately unsuccessful, though Macready was persuaded to play in *Strafford* in 1837. He was happier in using drama without much thought of practical application to the theatre, as in *Paracelsus* (1835), a brilliant expression of his philosophy, or in *Pippa Passes* (1841), where his ideas are simply but aptly shown through a series of human actions. He was interested not so much in the conflict of a group of characters, as in the fortunes of a single mind, and for this purpose he evolved the 'dramatic monologue'; it was in this form that many of his best known pieces were composed, 'Andrea del Sarto', 'Fra Lippo Lippi', 'Saul' and 'The Bishop orders his Tomb'. Their appearance in a series of volumes, which included *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Men and Women* (1855), and *Dramatis Personae* (1864), gave him in the latter half of the century a reputation second only to that of Tennyson. He put his method to his greatest test in 'The Ring and the Book' (1868-9), where a series of dramatic monologues is woven to make one of the longest poems in the language. Browning had selected a sordid Italian Crime, which Carlyle sardonically described as an old Bailey story that could have been told in five minutes, and he so examined the minds of all that came into contact with it that not only their motives, but the whole of his philosophy of life become apparent. After *The Ring and his Book* his poetry develops in obscurity, though some of these later pieces have a subtle interest quite distinct from anything in the earlier work.

He remains one of the most difficult poet to assess. His poems are crowded with memorable characters, and the whole of Renaissance Italy comes to life in his pages. At first he seems to have created a world of living people as Shakespeare had done, but a closer inspection shows that Browning's men and women are not free. They live in a spiritually totalitarian state in which Browning is Chancellor and God is president, always with the proviso that the Chancellor is the President's



voice on earth. His own life had been, in the best sense, fortunate, so that he knew little of evil, and yet, theoretically, evil had fascinated. Had he known more of life he might have come to realize evil as a fierce and positive corruption in human life and that realization would have deepened his poetry.

### 16. Browning's Theory of Poetry

Browning was not content with poetic practice merely ; he was all through his life a profound student of his theory as well. In *Pauline and Paracelsus* Browning has given us the tendencies and dangers of his artist-character. Long afterwards, in *Fin-fine at the Fair* and in *Aristophanes Apology*, he gives an elaborate and carefully reasoned theory of poetic art. In *Transcendentalism* and *How it Strikes a Contemporary* he has given us his conception of the dignity of the poet's function. In his *Essay on Shelley* he has given us in detail his theory of poetry.

In poetry as in art Browning insists on the deeper value of life, of soul, then of mere expression or technique as even of mere inbreathing beauty. Discussing Browning's theory of poetry as shown *Sordello*, Herford has observed "*Sordello* is a young poet's attempt to cope with the problem of the poet's function, the relation of art to life, and of life to art. Neither Goethe nor Tennyson thought more loftily of the possibilities of the poetic art. And neither insisted more peremptorily or rather assumed more unquestionably—that it fulfils these possibilities when the poet labours in the service of man. He is earth's essential king, but his kingship rests upon his carrying out the kingliest of mottos—'I serve'. Browning all his life had a hearty contempt for the foppery of 'Art for Art', and he never conveyed it with more incisive brilliance than in the sketch of *Sordello's* opposite, the Troubadour Eglamor

How he loved that art  
The calling marking him a man apart  
From men—one not to care, like counsel for  
Cold hearts, comfortless faces,.....since verse, the gift  
Was his, and men, the whole of then, must shift  
without it.

To Eglamor his art is mysterious ritual, which he is the sacred priest, and his happy rhyme the divine response vouchsafed to him in answer. Such beauty as he produces is no



effluence from a soul making itself, like Wordsworth's 'in love and holy passion with the universe', but a cunning application of the approved recipes for expective writing current in the literary guild :

He, no genius rare  
Transfigured in firs or wave or air  
At will, but a poor gnome that cloistered up  
In some rock-chamber, with his gate-cup,  
His topaz-rod, hissed-pearl, in these few  
And their arrangement finds enough to do  
For his best art.

From these mysticisms and technicalities of Troubadour and other poetic guilds Browning decisively detaches his poet. Sordello is not a victory of poetry ; he does not 'cultivate the Muse' ; he does not even prostrate himself before the beauty and wonder of the visible universe.

Poetry is the atmosphere in which he lives ; and in the beauty without he recognises the dream 'dream come true' of a soul which (like that of Pauline's Lover) 'existence' thus can not satiate, cannot surprise'.

"Laugh thou at envious fate', adorers cry to this inspired Platonist.

Who from earth's simplest combination.....  
Dost car to heaven's complexest essence, rife  
With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,  
Equal to being all

And in truth, his power of imaginative apprehension has no bounds. From the native self reflexion of his boyish dreams he passes on to vision which embraces continually fuller measure of life, until he forestalls the sublime Dantesque conception of poetry vast and deep as humanity, where every soul will stand forth revealed in its naked truth. But he can not, like Dante, put his vast conceptions in to the shakles of intelligible, speech. His uncompromising 'infinity' will not comply with finite conditions, and he remains an inefficient and inarticulate genius, a Hamlet in poetry".

But Browning's views on his own art were set out most clearly not in any verse but in the *Introductory Essay* which he wrote to precede the (supposed) letters of Shelley, published in 1852.



In this connection Ernest Rhys has observed in his book, *Lyric Poetry* : In his essay on Shelley, Browning offered a clue to his own poetic faith, which may help us to mark the difference between their practice in verse. 'The objective poet,' he says, chooses to deal with the doings of men (the result of which dealing in its pure form is what we call dramatic poetry), while the subjective poet, whose study has been himself, appealing through himself to the absolute divine mind, prefers to dwell up on those external scenes which strike out most adamantly his inner light and power, selects that silence of the earth and sea which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart and leaves the noisy, complex, yet imperfect exhibitions of nature in the manifold experience of man around him which serve only to distract and suppress the working of his brain'.

"Shelley had his region in the aerial plain and that emotional photosphere, in which the greater and lesser lights, shadow and substance, and the elements play upon the spirits of men and women and the regularising harmony of his principle of love. Browning had a greater feeling for our human intercourse on earth, and in order to generate a sufficient artistic excitement when treating it, he required some grotesque or fantastic stimulus or other, mediæval or picturesque, as in certain of his dramatic romances. With Shelley everything was lyrical and transcendent first and by instinct ; he was the singing apostle of man in nature and super nature, and his verse was that fiery and exquisite and aspiring quality which tends to out run verbal melody altogether, and to seek an outlet only to be attained in pure music. In this he was only doing what the Greek lyricist seemed to hint at—using a tongue which sounds like voice of nature herself growing articulate in the throats of men. The cloud, the wind, the torrent, the Engean Hills, the Acroceraunion Mountains, are heard in his verse.....With Browning, these things count, they are all incidental to the human comedy. Usually he is extensive, instead of ecstatic ; and to get his lyric a dramatic illusion he freely uses the colloquial idiom."

## 17. Browning's Reputation

There have been interesting fluctuations in the reputation of his poetic career he was very little appreciated, but after the publication of the "*Ring and the Book*" his reputation steadily increased until at the end of the nineteenth century it stood at



the highest. But after 1910 and especially during the First Great War it suffered a setback and in the present time scales are evenly balanced. Expressing the same idea in the language of a business man, D. C. Somerwell has observed : "There is a tide in the affairs of men, and particularly in the reputation of men of letters. The shrewd man who had brought 'Browning' any time in the first half of the reign of Queen Victoria and held then till the end of the century could then have realised a very pretty fortune.

On the other hand, the man who bought what our first men sold, and held it through the great War down to the present time, would have made a bad bargain. He should have sold out not later than 1910. Today one could only advise to 'hold on' and hope for the best." Reviewing the fluctuations of Browning, Somerwell has observed in his essay. 'The reputation of Robert Browning' : "Browning published *Pauline* anonymously in 1833 and *Paracelsus* under his own name in 1935.

The merits of these poems were not recognised. Then followed *Sordello*, which was rated as a terribly obscure poem. The next twenty years saw the publication of most of what eventually made Browning popular with the earnest general public. Though this popularity came much later and he had to suffer from general neglect for a long time. Browning retained and steadily extended a circle of admirers among the 'fit though few'. Ruskin in the fourth volume of *modern English*, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit. Landor spoke of him as a great poet, a very great indeed, as the world will have to agree with us in thinking, and in verse :

Since Chaucer was alive and hale  
No man hath walked along our road with step  
So active, so enquiring eye, and tongue  
So varied in discourse.

The second Earl of Lytton, afterwards Viceroy of India and a poet under the pseudonym of Owen Meredith, also praised in verse as one

Then whom a mightier master never  
Touched the deep chords of hidden things :  
Nor error did from truth disserve  
With keener glance ; nor made endeavour



To rise on holder wings  
 In these high regions of the soul  
 Where thought itself grows dim with awe.

These two verse quotations, both dating from before 1860, together suggest the points on which the wide popularity of Browning was afterward to rest—his robust humanity, his keen eye for the picturesque and the curious, his metrical and linguistic versatility, his powerful handling of religious emotion. Yet in general estimation he still ranked not only far below Tennyson but also below his own wife ; and it may be added that to the day of his death Browning himself entirely agreed with the verdict which put both Tennyson and Mrs. Browning above him.

*The Ring and the Book* was published in 1868-9, and the *Antheneum*, a critical journal, wrote : 'we must record at once our conviction, not merely that *The Ring and the Book* is beyond all parallel the supremest poetical achievement of our time, but that it is the most precious and profound spiritual treasure that England has produced since the days of Shakespeare'. After this Browning suddenly penetrated to the great heart of the people, British and American. In 1881, the Browning Society was founded by Dr. Furnivall and Miss Hickey, and in 1886 Arthur Symonds published his *Introduction to Browning* which may be taken as typical of the attitude to Browning which was becoming orthodox among the wide public by 1880, and remained so through the first decade at least of the twentieth century :

"In richness of nature, in scope and penetration of mind and vision, in all potentialities of poetry he is probably second among English poets to Shakespeare alone. In art, in the power or the patience of working his native ore, he is surpassed by many ; but few have ever held so rich a mine in fee ..... If the best poetry is that which reproduces the most of life, his place is among the great poets of the world. In the vast extent of his work he has dealt with or touched on nearly every phase and feature of humanity, and his scope is bounded only by the soul's limits, and the last reaches of life..... In one very important matter, that of rhyme, he is the greatest master in our language..... His lyrical poems contain more structural varieties of form than those of any preceding poet.



I do not hesitate to put his portraits of women quite on a level with his portraits of men, and far beyond those of any other English poet of the last three centuries. As a humorist in poetry Browning takes rank with the greatest. It is of remarkably wide capacity and ranges from the effervescence of pure fun and freak to that salt and bring laughter whose taste is bitterer than tears . . . . Of all poets Browning is the healthiest and manliest. The most subtle of minds, his is the least sickly. The wind that blows in his pages is not hot and languorous breeze, laden with scents and sweets, but a fresh salt wind blowing from his sea. His poetry is a tonic : it braces and invigorates.

Browning's Christianity is wider than our creeds, and is all more vitally Christian in it that it never sinks into pietism."

Only one note of criticism is apparent in this panegyric. In art he is surpassed by many. But the thorough-going Browningite would not allow that. Art, it was said, was of more than one kind and Browning's art was not classical as all poetry hither to had been, but Bothic.

with Browning.

"Poetry emancipates itself as architecture had done long before, and broke in to the 'Labyrinthine lawlessness to a Gothic Cathedral'. Now no one accuses a Gothic gargoyle of irrelevance ; and when once Browning's method has ceased to surprise, no one will object to the corresponding excrescence in poetry. On the contrary, it will be welcomed, for it is more lifelike. The Universe, so far as we understand it, is not a symmetrical orderly thing at all ; and it came not be finally expressed in the Greek categories. For every work of art is nothing more or less than a complex predicate—the predicate whose subject and copula are the two words 'life is' ; only so has it meaning. And the Gothic method supplies a truer predicate than the Greeks, just because it can harmonise in congruity without abolishing it'.

Once Browning had reached the public that was ready for him his appeal to it was as various as the excellences enumerated by Symons.

But it means probably the religious element in his poetry that counted for most in his sales, for the religious public has always been a buying public. There was a time when a certain kind of clergyman could hardly get out of the pulpit until he had quoted something from *An Epistle Easter Day*, *A Death in a Desert*,



*Rabbi Ben Ezra*.....one of the most fortunate events for the *prolongation* of the boom was the revival of the *English Men of Letters* series in 1903. Browning was entrusted to a young writer Chesterton and his book was a immense success. For the younger generation it supplied exactly what was wanted. They had no need to go for interpreters to the two solemn lubrications of ageing members of the Browning Society. The eminent Victorian poet, dead fourteen years, was sponsored by one of the loveliest, soon to be one of the most famous of the Edwardians. To those who read Browning because of Browning, were added those who read Browning because of Chesterton. After this there was a turn in the tide and there was a definite setback in the reputation of Browning. Referring to this change, Sommerwell has pointed out : "One might perhaps say that during the war, we housed a large part of our library ; after the war we took back some of it from the warehouse and left the rest. Browning was on the whole left in the warehouse. A new generation was growing up, believing itself, not altogether rightly to be in a new world. It wanted new prophets, and it would only take such of the old prophets as the new prophets choose to introduce to it. Moreover, there is a tide, and Browning's prolonged high tide had to be followed by an ebb.....Browning was one of the poets unknown to the parental library. Moreover, Browning was long, and one had no time for length ; he was 'hearty' and 'healthy' and 'manly'—tedious attributes ; he was an incorrigible optimist ; he shapped you on the back with his 'All's love and All's low', and his

God's in his heaven

Dinner's at seven

All's right with the world.....

are words to that effect. He paraded the jocularly of bachelor uncle ; he became suddenly grave and talked about one's soul and heaven, and all that sort of thing.

In fact, one simply did not want him. The fastidious and classical few, Santayana for example, who had always refused to bow down before Browning, were right after all.

Thus it was possible for a very good and very typical modern critic, Mr. F. L. Lucas, to write : Something has come between us to day and Tennyson and Browning, the Joehin and Boaz of the Solomon's temple, the Victorian era. It is the



presence of a potential didacticism based upon philosophy of life we can not share, which alloys their veritable gold. No doubt there are still persons who enjoy being slapped on his back because 'Morning's at seven' and 'Heaven' rhymes with it; but in living poets that note is fortunately absent. And again more savagely : 'The twentieth century has not been particularly rich in good poets, even good minors, but at least they have not paraded that complacent and obtuse satisfaction, with human life, which Browning once flaunted as a white lie. Better any wormwood than that saccharine.'

The real enemy to Browning's reputation in the 20th century was the totally false legend that his characters had very little to do with the poet himself ; there were so many points invented for the purpose of stating so many particular points of view. This 'parnassian Browning, a multiple impersonating, a master of realistic detail and didacticism' seems to Sir Maurice Bowra a sort of sententious grave-digger at funeral of the last Romantics. For Prof. Tilyard, 'Browning is capable of expressing the small social and moral commonplaces, the more quotidian of the human passions, but lacks that obliquity of approach that knack of saying several things at once, without which, according to the Cambridge school 'nothing profound can be expressed'. John Haath Stubs who has studied poetry from a psycho-analysis point of view, considers that the imagery of Browning's poems contradicts the intellectual creed of courage and optimism which was the outward face that Browning turned to the world. According to him Browning rendered poetry palatable to the earnest Puritan intellectuals of his day, and he was pre-occupied with the expression of half digested thought. To Miss Katheline Raine, whose ideal visionary poet must 'participate in the unconscious and half conscious imaginings of the community', Browning is a major poet but a poet only in the lowest sense in which it is possible to use the word at all.'

Contemporary critics are prone to approach Browning with preconceptions concerning the nature of poetry that make it impossible for them to accept him for what he is.

As pointed out by Cohen, 'there is a further obstacle to the appreciation of Browning that looms even larger at the present day than the objection of the psychological critics, and that is the backwash of imagist theory that still informs much poetic criticism. We have come back too closely at the strength, origi-



nality, and evocative power of the single poetic image, and to read our poetry, if not phrase by phrase at least line by line, blind to the large scale poetic organisation. Browning, however, like Shakespeare and Milton, built his poems massively. Often as Sir Maurice Bowra has pointed out he is careless of individual words ; sometimes his ear is defective and rhythm careless, and like all Victorian poets he finds it hard to solve the problem of poetic diction. His rhythms, conceived on a basis of dramatic speech, Elizabethan in its influence, are spoken rhythms. His overcompression—Elizabethan too in its way—tends, as Swinburne pointed out, to make his meanings at times obscure."

### 18. A Modern Critical Study of Browning as a Poet

A modern reader emerging from the formidable tracts of Browning's poems and plays is likely to discount the poet's early reputation for tough originality and see him rather as a typical if faintly rebellious spokesman of his age.

In politics and morals he stands for the liberalism of his generation (1812-89) ; his religion is an undogmatic evangelical nonconformity ; he is the Victorian tourist rampart in his gusto for men and critics and his patronising connoisseurship in the art of the past ; he is a representative philistine in his hearty message of progress and his shadow-boxing with doubt. And he is typical of his age in his treatment of his verse medium, with his profuse neo-gothic ornament and his heavy handed ingenuity in diction, rhyme and stanza-forms. He was a poet competing with essayists and novelists ; and it might have been luckier for his abounding gifts if he could have followed the tradition of Dryden and Crabbe without feeling the itch to modernize his craft or the obligation to deliver a message. Browning himself, of course, could never have agreed with this; he was too deeply attached to the romantic conception of the poet as magician, visionary, and prophet. Shelley is the main literary inspiration behind his first poems, the half-confessional studies in the development of a soul'—*Pauline* (1833) *Paracelsus* (1835) and the notoriously obscure *Sordello* (1840) ; and to Shelley he returns, in an essay of 1851, as the type of the 'subjective' poet who finds God within himself :

Not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity he has to do ; and he digs



where he stands, preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak.

Browning takes Shakespeare as the type of the 'objective' or dramatic writer, but it is the subjective poet, he says, who might seem to be the ultimate requirement of every age. He thus promotes Shelley to the rank of Carlyle's poet heroes.

True, Browning had very soon begun to relinquish the ideal of pure subjectivity, to reject the anarchic and the ethereal qualities in Shelley, Keats, and Byron, and to share the desire of his own generation for a literature of 'facts' and moral usefulness, if not respectability.

Between 1837 and 1846—the year of his marriage—he has written his eight plays, including *Pippa Passes*, and the two volumes of *Dramatic Lyrics* and *Dramatic Romances*, which stands as near to Scott as to Shelley. Nevertheless, his change of aim was not altogether whole hearted. 'What I have printed gives no knowledge of me' he wrote to Elizabeth Barrett in 1845; ..... 'I never have begun, even, what I hope I was born to begin and end—"R. B. a poem": and in another letter, more regretfully

You speak out, you. I only make men and women speak, give you truth broken into prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light, even if it is in me but I am going to try.

In effect, he did not 'speak out'.

On the contrary, in his essay on Shelley he tried to justify the poetry of 'prismatic hues' historically by suggesting that after the subjective prophets there must come another race of poets, 'prodigal of objects for men's outer and not inner sight,' poets who 'break up' the visionary synthesis in to 'parts of independent and unclassed value, careless of the unknown laws for recombining them'—though confident that progress will bring about a new synthesis in due course. This is evidently the category designed for Browning himself, and he came to resent any suggestion that he revealed his own mind in his characters. But if he put himself forward as an 'objective' poet, it was largely in spite of his own wishes. And no doubt his failure to 'speak out' must have been responsible for much of his obscurity of his verse,



for its mystifying digressions, tortuous reasoning, and abnormally involved syntax. At its best his poetry has the courage of its defects. He is the poet of half-lights, of ambiguous situations, of spiritual failure.

In *Christmas Eve and Easter day*, possibly written under his wife's influence (1850), Browning comes as near as any where to speaking out on. In the first poem he is transported, by the clumsy mechanism of dream, from Zion Chapel, beside a dreaming common in the London shuns, to St. Peter's in Rome, and then to a Gottingen Lecture-hall, where a German professor expounds the Higher Criticism ; his heart is with the Dissenter's form of worship, although congregation in Mount Zion are squalid and the preacher absurd.

Easter day presents a more painful self examination. The main speaker there describes how, one Easter-night, on this same common near Mount Zion, he had suddenly seen the whole night sky burst in to 'A fierce vindictive scribble of red quick flame across', so that he had known it was the Judgement Day, when he must choose between the world and God. He clings to the beauty of the world ; whereupon the figure of Christ appears to him and condemns him to his choice.

He is forced to realise that neither nature, art, poetry, nor love can reopen the gate of Heaven for him ; all he has left is a desperate yearning. Since he has had his chance and lost it he can really find no comfort in the second speaker's belief that

You must mix some uncertainty  
With faith, if you would have faith be;—

and the second speaker is Browning's normal argumentative self. At most, the other self of *Easter day* can hope that the vision he has seen may be no more than a dream. A great deal of Browning's writing is connected with the substance of this vision. The natural world of his poem of Saul, or Caliban, for instance—is a solid, rough—hewn, colourful world, inbred with an ever-changing plastic power ; a world of volcanic rocks, of agitated skies and waters, stones, clustering flower—forms, and polluting animal life ; an alluring but also a menacing world for the poet's worship. It brings intense stimulate and challenge to Browning's acquisitive men and women, his craftsmen, collectors, travellers, and enquirers, who encounter their environment as



an obstacle or a quarry. He describes life in tangible metaphors of quest or adventure, as a ride, a pilgrimage, a research, an ocean voyage, a task of knight-errantry. But the goal of the adventure is not equally plain. Either Browning makes a flourish about soul somehow sparking from flesh or he reduces his poems to bits of immediate sensation.

On the whole, he is more successful, his poetry is more consistently alive, as he leans towards the second alternative. His inmost relationship to his world is a state of excited, unquiet possession. A characteristic example is the short dramatic lyric *Meeting at Night* (1845), where the lover's tingling senses acknowledge his surroundings—the startled little waves, the slushy sand, the sea-scented beach. 'The three fields to cross'—merely as stages on his advance to the anticipated climax of 'two hearts beating each to each'. Every 'detail here, including for once the syntax, contributes directly to the main impression, the sensation of pleasurable excitement though Browning adds a *tailpiece*, *Parting at Morning*, to show that love is not the speaker's resting place, he has also 'the need of a world of men'.

*Meeting at Night* is one of the very few completely organised poems of Browning; another is the more sombre and impressive *Childe Roland* (1852), a poem unusual in its composition because it 'came upon' him, Browning says, 'as a kind of dream' (as a rule, he held that a poet never dreams). In *Childe Roland*, too, the main effect depends on physical sensation, though in this case the sensation is heavily charged with the mood and something of the imagery of the vision in *Easter Day*. The knight, Childe Roland, has been wandering for years on a mysterious and apparently hopeless quest.

He meets a repulsive cripple who points out the way. He mistrusts the cripple but obeys him, to find himself riding alone in the dusk on a ghastly plain of weeds and stunted grass where Nature seems to be waiting 'peevishly' for the fire of judgement. He tries to cheer himself by recalling his old companions on the quest but can only think of their disasters. He reaches a second plain, even grimmer than the first, where the ground is strangely churned by the marks of battle, and he comes upon noneless engines of torture. In the gathering dusk the plain has surrounded itself with hills: no way forward. At the same time the knight realizes that this place is, in fact, his destination:



And just as far as ever from the end !  
 Nought in the distance but the evening, nought  
 To point my foot steps further ! At the thought,  
 A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,  
 Soiled past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned  
 That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought...  
 Burningly it came on me all at once,  
 This was the place !.....

There stands his Dark Tower ; on the hills around him he perceives 'the lost adventures (his) peers' watching and waiting. Dauntless, he sets his horn to his lips and blows the signal.

*Childe Roland* has been compared to '*The Ancient Mariner*'. Browning is more self-conscious than Coleridge and more artful in managing the suspense, but than his problem is different, a problem of choice and the will like that of the speaker in *Easter day*. The Decisive ordeal, whatever its nature, must be faced in the present ; when the knight summons his courage the nightmare ends. But this time Browning does not try to suggest what the ordeal means or what is its result.

There is not much room in *Childe Roland's* mind for reflection. Usually, however, Browning gives his speakers more than enough time to comment as they disclose their moment of crisis, their chance of happiness seized or missed. They turn the action and over examine alternatives ; they stand back from their sensations, draw a moral from them or try to, even consider what meaning they may have for some one else :

What ? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths  
 diminished, sigh on sigh,  
 Told them something ? Those suspensions,  
 Those solutions—  
 'Must we die ?'  
 Those commiserating sevenths—'Life might last !  
 we can but try !' (*A Toccata of Galuppi's* 1855)

And on the basis of such speculation Browning worked out a new conversational form of dramatic lyric, releasing an ironic interplay between the setting, the action, and the spoken comments. *The Monologue of two in the Campagna* (from *Men and Women*, 1855) is a good example of his method. Two lovers are



looking across the open country that covers the ruins of ancient Rome, and the man points out Nature's triumph over civilization :

The champaign with its endless fleece  
 Of feathery grasses everywhere !  
 Silence and passion, joy and peace,  
 An everlasting wash of air—  
 Rome's ghost since her decease  
 Such life there, through such lengths of hours,  
 Such miracles performed in play,  
 Such primal naked forms of flowers,  
 Such letting Nature have her way  
 While Heaven looks from its towers !

From this reflection he draws the Shelleyan inference that they also should love freely and naturally. But his plea marks the turning point of the little drama, not its climax. First Browning shows the man groping his way towards the thought he wants ; then, in the moment of expressing it, 'the good minute goes', the ease of Nature escapes him.

The opening verses are particularly successful except for a slight labouring of details :

For me I touched a thought, I know,  
 Has tantalised me many times,  
 (Like turns of thread the spiders throw  
 Mocking across our path) for rhymes  
 To catch at and let go.  
 Help me to hold it : first it left  
 The yellowing fennel, run to seed  
 There, branching from the brick work's cleft.  
 Some old tomb's ruin : yonder weed  
 Took up the floating weft.  
 Where one small arange cup amassed  
 Five beetles,—blind and green they grope  
 Among the honey-meal,—and last  
 Every where on the grassy slope  
 I traced it.      Hold it fast !

While Browning makes the description here move steadily forward towards the general thought of Nature's freedom and profusion, he makes the tempo of the speaker's mind appear slower



and more hesitant. And, together with this hesitant movement of the voice, the separate images convey a succession of gentle discords between Nature and the mind that contemplates her. This regretful undertone is carried on through the middle stanzas about 'Rome's ghost', and prepares for the last stanzas where 'the good minute goes' :

Already how am I so far  
Out of the minute ? Must I go  
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,  
Onward, wherever light winds blow,  
Fixed by no friendly star ?

Just when I seemed about to learn !  
Where is the thread now ? Off again !  
The old trick ! Only I discern—  
Infinite passion and the pain  
Of finite hearts that yearn.

A poem like this recalls Browning's admiration—exceptional in his time—for Donne. But quite apart from the difference of sentiment, a dramatic lyric by Donne has a tight, progressive logic, both on the plane of verbal reasoning and on the psychological plane, whereas Browning's poems tend to fall apart so that he has to pull them together with a resounding exclamation. The good minute goes from the poet as well as the lover.

×

×

×

Browning's inability to grasp situation firmly as a whole, or, as Santayana argues, his inability to transcend 'the crude experience... of self-consciousness', explains 'the arrest of his dramatic art at soliloquy'.

In the formal monologues in blank verse or heroic couplets for which he is famous he sets to make a virtue of his deficiency. The earlier ones, *My last Duchess* (1842) and *The Bishop Orders his tomb* (1845) are striking ironic character-sketches, in a manner recalling Chaucer but with a new wealth of sensational and circumstantial details. The later ones set out to exploit a problem ; they point forward to the speeches of special pleading by the characters of Shaw. They are still dramatic in so far as they reveal character within the framework of an ironic setting; but the sense of drama in them is swamped by argument as Browning turns the monologue into a form of confidential self-justification by men called upon to defend a questionable or



imperfect philosophy of life. The most notable of these apologists are Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea del Sarto, Bishop Blougram, Karshish, and Cleon (from *Men and Women*, 1855) and Caliban and Mr Sludge, 'the Medium' (from *Dramatis Personae*, 1864). Their names alone suggest the range of Browning's human curiosity—two Renaissance artists, a semifictitious Victorian Catholic, an imaginary Arab physician and an imaginary Greek poet from the first century of Christianity, Shakespeare's savage (speaking as an exponent of natural religion in the light of Darwinism), and a thinly disguised American spiritualist. But they are all concerned with two allied topics—with faith and success (or self-fulfilment, or the struggle for survival). And like the main speaker in *Easter Day*, though in varying degrees, all of them have failed or missed or evaded the test of an ultimate vision. The Arab physician and the Greek poet have brushed against the revelation they both need and have failed to grasp it. The Christian speakers are on the defensive, and their special interest for Browning is the opportunity they afford him of putting the case for an acknowledged imperfection. In addition, their social position is ambiguous. Fra Lippo Lippi is a scape-grace monk; Andrea del Sarto has to swallow disgrace and humiliation; the great bishop and the whining medium are both in some measure Charlatans:

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.....  
He said true things, but called them by wrong names.

The problem for the poet is where the bluffing ends and the candour begins; and this cannot or will not resolve.

The two artists are the most sympathetically drawn of these characters.

Fra Lippo cannot 'paint souls', but he speaks up vigorously for Browning's naturalist aesthetic:

.....do you feel thankful ay or no,  
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,  
The mountain round it and the sky above,  
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,  
These are the frame to? what's it all about?  
To be passed o'er, despised? dwelt upon,  
Wondered at?



And del Sarto caps the argument for his creator by minimizing the value of technical perfection :

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a Heaven for ? all is silver-grey  
Placid and perfect with my art : the worse !

But the most original conceptions are those of the Arab doctor who has examined Lazarus since his return from the dead and the Catholic bishop out-manoeuvring his guest and critic in a leisured overflow of cynical benevolence. Blougram stands at the centre of the poet's World ; he makes him a fascinating and memorable figure as an epicurean prince of the Church, at once self-satisfied and earnest. Yet the irony of the portrait is self-destructive, for Browning cannot convince the reader that he knows the 'true things' in Blougram's mind from the false. Half of the bishop's argument is simply that faith pays ; the other half is in effect a rejoinder to *Easter day*. Neither total faith nor total unbelief is possible to human beings ; the best that man can achieve is an unremitting suppression of doubt. The impossibility of total submission of belief is conveyed in a few lines of violent intensity which recall the poet's own words about his fear of 'the pure white light' :

Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain  
And lidless eye and disenprisoned heart  
Less certainly would wither up at once  
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.

But the corollary to this, the need for intellectual struggle, is presented in terms of flimsy and desultory emotion, as in Blougram's argument against the viability of doubt :

Just when we are safest, there's a surest-touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,  
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—  
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears  
As old and new at once as Nature's self,  
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,  
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,  
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—  
The grand Perhaps !

The grand perhaps may be defensible metaphysics but it produces wooly poetry.



*The Ring and the Book* (1868-9) is Browning's most ambitious effort to construct a whole work out of 'truth broken in to prismatic hues'. Here he follows a Roman murder trial of the late seventeenth century through twelve successive monologues, containing many more than a dozen opinions of the case. As Henry James declared, *The Ring and the Book* has the elements of an excellent novel; intricate in itself, the case ravifies by way of partial evidence pleadings, gossip and judgement, until a whole society is drawn in; there are anticipations of the method James himself was to use in the way one subjective version of the affair cancels or modifies another. And Browning is very skilful in varying the run of his blank verse to suit the speaker and the occasion. Nevertheless, the book never comes to life for long. There is no real progress from one speech to the next, no internal development, because Browning has reduced all his complex material to a simple, external contrast between chivalry and chicane; on the one hand, he gives his people flashes of intuition, on the other, torrents of irrelevant casuistry:

Any thing, any thing to let the wheels  
Of argument run glibly to their goal

It was only a short step from 'The Ring and the Book' to the tedious word-spinning of the poet's twenty years. Neglected while he was doing his best work, at the period of *Men and Women*, Browning was more than compensated by the reverence accorded to him as a sage after the sixties; and the reaction, as in Santayana's devastating essay on *The Poetry of Barbarism* (1900), was inevitable. Once Browning's opinions had fallen out of date, the muddle and patch work in his art were clearly to be seen. He failed to revive the poetic drama or create a satisfying novel in verse; he failed to reach a stable compromise between the visionary and realist. Yet much of the best of subsequent poetry, of Pound and Eliot in particular, owes a considerable debt to Browning's experiments in conversational verse and his ironic—confidential monologues; and English poetry would be much the poorer if Browning had not attempted to translate his romanticism into the language of contemporary life.



## SPECIAL INTRODUCTION

### 1. "CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"

Like *The Flight of the Duchess*, *Childe Roland* is a Romantic Poem. It describes a brave knight performing a pilgrimage in which hitherto all who attempted it have failed. The way through which he struggles is unknown to him; its features are hideous; a deadly sense of difficulty and danger hangs over every step; and though *Childe Roland's* courage is pledged to the undertaking, the thought of failure at last comes to him as a relief. He reaches the goal just as failure appears inevitable. The plain has suddenly closed in; weird and unsightly eminences encompass him on every side. In one flash he perceives that he is in a trap; in another, that the tower stands before him; while round it, against the hill sides, are revged the lost "lost adventures" who have preceded him—their names and story changing loudly and more loudly in his ears their forms revealed with ghastly clearness in the last fires of the setting sun. So far the picture is consistent; but if we look below its surface discrepancies appear. The tower is much nearer and more accessible than *Childe Roland* has thought; a sinister-looking man, of whom he asked the way, and who, as he believed, was deceiving him; has really put him on the right track; and as he describes the country through which he passes, it becomes clear that half its horrors are created by his own heated imagination, or by some undefined influence in the place itself. We are left in doubt whether those who have found failure in this quest, have not done so through the very act of attainment in it; and when, dauntless, *Childe Roland* sounds his slughorn and announces that he has come, we should not know, but that he lives to tell the tale, whether in doing this he incurs, or is escaping, the general doom. We can connect no idea of definite pursuit or attainment with a series of facts so dreamlike and so disjointed: still less extract from it a definite moral; and we are reduced to taking the poem as a simple work of fancy, built up of picturesque impressions which have, separately or collectively, produced themselves in the author's mind. But these picturesque impressions had, also, their ideal side, which Mr. Browning as spontane-



ously reproduced ; and we may all recognize under the semblance of the enchanted country and the adventurous knight, a poetic vision of life : with its conflicts, contradictions and mockeries ; its difficulties which give way when they seem most insuperable ; its successes which look like failures, and its failures which look like success. The thing we may not do is to imagine that an intended lesson is conveyed by it.

### Critical Remarks on the Poem

At the head of the poem is a note: "See Edgar's song in Lear. In Act III., scene IV, Edgar disguised as a madman, says, while the storm rages: Who gives anything to poor Tom? whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, through ford and whirlpool, over bog and quagmire that path laid knives under his pillow and halts in his pew ; sets ratsbane by his porridge ; made him proud of heart to ride on a bay trottinghorse over four inched bridges, to course his own shadow for a traitor.— Bless thy fine wits ! tom's a-cold—o do de, do de, do, de.— Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking ! Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes." At the end of the scene Edgar sings :—

"Childe Rowland to the dark tower came,  
His word was still,—Fie, fop and fun  
I smell the blood of a British man."

"Childe Roland was the youngest brother of Helen. Under the guidance of Merlin he undertook to bring back his sister from elf-land, whither the fairies had carried her, and he succeeded in his perilous exploit."—Dr. Brewer. (See the ancient Ballade of Burd Helen.) Childe was a term specially applied to the scions of knightly families before their admission to the degree of knighthood, as "Chyld Waweyn, Loty's Sone" (Robert of Gloucester).

This wonderful poem, one of the grandest pieces of word-painting in our language, has exercised the ingenuity of Browning students more than any other of the poet's works. *Sordello* is difficult to understand, but it was intended by poet to convey a definite meaning and important lessons, but *Childe Roland*, we have been warned again and again, was written without any moral purpose whatever. "We may see in it," says Mrs. Orr, "a poetie vision of life.....The thing we may not do



is to imagine that we are meant to recognise it." A paper was read at the Browning Society on this poem by Mr. Kirkman (Browning Society Papers, Part iii, p. 21) suggesting an interpretation of the allegory. In the discussion which followed, Dr. Furnivall said "he had asked Browning if it was an allegory, and in answer had, on three separate occasions, received an emphatic 'no'; that it was simply a dramatic creation called forth by a line of Shakespeare's. Browning had written it one day in Paris, as a vivid picture suggested by Edgar's line; the horse was suggested by the figure of a red horse in a piece of tapestry in Browning's house . . . ." Still, Dr. Furnivall thought, it was quite justifiable that any one should use the poem to signify whatever image it called up in his own mind. "But he must not confuse the poet's mind with his. The poem was not an allegory, and was never meant to be one" The Hon. Roden Noel, who was in the chair on this occasion said "he himself had never regarded *Childe Roland* as having any hidden meaning; nor had cared so to regard it. But words are mystic symbols: they mean more, very often, than the utterer of them, poet or puppet, intended". When some one asked Mendelssohn what he meant by his *Lieder Ohne Worte*, the musician replied that "they meant what they said." A poem so consistent as a whole, with a narrative in which every detail follows in a perfectly regular and natural sequence, must inevitably convey to the thinking mind some great and powerful idea, suiting itself to his view of life considered as a journey or pilgrimage. The wanderings of the children of Israel from Egypt to the promised land may be considered simply as a historical event, like the migrations of the tartars or the North men; or they may be viewed as an allegory of the Christian life, like Bunyan's immortal dream. The historian of the Exodus could never have had in his mind all the interpretations put upon the incidents which he recorded; yet we have the warrant of St. Paul for allegorising the story. A narrative of a journey through a desert to a definite end held in view through out the way, is certain to be pounced upon as an allegory; and it is impossible but that Mr. Browning must have had some notion of a 'central purpose' in his poem. Indeed, when the Rev. John W. Chadwick visited the poet, and asked him if constancy to an ideal—"He that endureth to the end shall be saved"—was not a sufficient understanding of the central purpose of the poem, he



said, "yes, just about that." Mr. Kirkman, in the paper already referred to, says, "There are overwhelming reasons for concluding that this poem describes, after the manner of an allegory, the sensations of a sick man very near to death—*Rabbi Ben Ezra and Prospice*—are the two angles that lead on to *Childe Roland*." Mr. Nettleship, in his well known essay on the poem, says the central idea is this: "Take some great end which men have composed to themselves in life, which seemed to have truth in it, and power to spread freedom and happiness on others; but as it comes in sight, it falls strangely short of preconceived ideas, and stands up in hideous prosaicness." Mrs. James L. Bagg, in the *Interpretation of Childe Roland*, read to the Syracuse (U. S.) Browning club, gives the following on the lesson of the poem:—"The secrets of the universe are not to be discovered by exercise of reason, nor are they to be recompensed by revelation. A life of *becoming, being, and doing*, is not loss, nor failure, nor discomfiture, though the dark tower for ever tantalise and for ever withhold." Some have been in the poem an allegory of *love*, others of *the search after truth*. Others, again, understand the Dark tower to represent Unfaith, and the obscure land that of Doubt-Doubting Castle and the By-Path Meadow of John Bunyan, in short. For my own part, I see in the allegory—for I can consider it no other—a picture of the age of Materialistic Science, a "science falsely so called" which aims at the destruction of all our noblest ideals of religious faith in the unseen. The pilgrim is a truth seeker, misdirected by the lying spirit—the hoary cripple, unable to be or do anything good or noble himself; in him I see the synical, destructive critic, who sits at our universities and colleges, our medical schools and our firesides, to point our youth to the desolate path of Atheistic Science, a science which strews the ghastly landscape with wreck and ruthless ruin, with the blanching bones of animals tortured to death by its "engines and wheels, with rusty teeth of steel"—a science which has invaded the healing art, and is sending students of medicine daily down the road where surgeons become cancergrafters (as the Paris and Berlin medical scandals have revealed) and where physicians gloat over their animal victims—

"Toads in a poisoned tank,  
Or wild cats in a red hot iron cage,"



in their passion to reach the dark tower of knowledge, which to them has neither door nor window. The lost adventurers are the men who, having followed this false path, have failed, and who look eagerly for the next fool who comes to join the band of the lost ones. "In the Paris School of Medicine," says Mr. Lily in his *Right and Wrong*, "it has lately been prophesied that, 'when the rest of the world has risen to the intellectual level of France, the present crude and vulgar notions regarding morality, religion, Divine providence, and so forth, will be swept entirely away, and the dicta of science will remain the sole guide of some and educated men.'" Had Mr. Browning intended to write for us an allegory in aid of our crusade, a sort of medical Pilgrim's Progress, he could scarcely have given the world a more faithful picture of the student of medicine who sets forth on the fatal course of an experimental torturer. I have good authority for saying that, had Mr. Browning seen this interpretation of his poem, he would have cordially accepted it as at least one legitimate explanation. Most of the commentators agree that when Childe Roland "dauntless set the slug horn to his lips and blew 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came,'" he did so as a warning to others that he had failed in his quest, and that the way of the Dark Tower was the way of destruction and death.

### Browning's Attitude Towards Nature

A poet's attitude towards Nature gives us a deeper clue to his imaginative quality and temperament. It is interesting, for example, that Shelley should have selected the skylark for an ode and Keats the nightingale. The skylark, with its associations of morning, sunshine, joyous rapture of song and adventurous flight, is as symbolic of Shelley's poetic genius as is the nightingale, with its associations of night, darkness, melancholy and romantic sweetness, of Keat's genius. Wordsworth, on the other hand, prefers the homely stock dove. Browning's references are zoological indicating his liking for the quaint and the grotesque, for Nature's freaks rather than her beauties. If he tells us that 'Lark's on the wing', he also immediately points out that the 'snail's on the thorn'. He was attracted more by frogs, toads, snakes, jerboas, rats than in all the birds of song put together. Even his imagery sometimes originates with creeping creatures of nature :



The water's in stripes like a snake olive pale. The love of bizarre and grotesque can be detected also in the scenic background of *Childe Roland*. All this is deliberate.

Browning was interested in Nature in her relation with man and not in isolation..... He was conscious of the strangely subtle interpretation of the visible scene with the passion of the seeing soul. For him Nature is not more alive, but her life thrills in subtler relation with the life of man. In this connection Herford has pointed out: "Browning's subtler feeling for Nature sprang from his profounder insight into love. Love was his way of approach, as it was eminently not Wordsworth's, to the transfigured Nature which Wordsworth first disclosed. It is habitually lovers who have these visions,—all that was mystical in Browning's mind attaching itself, in fact, in some way to his ideas of love. To the Two in Compagna its primeval silence grows instinct with passion, and its peace with joy,—the joy of illimitable space and freedom, alluring yet mocking the finite heart that yearns to the lovers of the Alpine gorge the old woods, heaped and dim, that hung over their trothplighting, mysteriously drew them together; the moment that broke down the bar between soul and soul also beaking down as it were, the bar between men and nature:

The forests had done it; there they stood;  
We caught for a moment the powers at play;  
They had mingled us so, for once and good,  
Their work was done, we might go or stay,  
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

Such 'monuments' were, in fact, for Browning as well as for his lovers rare and fitful exceptions to the general nonchalance (indifference) of Nature towards human affairs. The powers did good, as they did evil, 'at play'; intervening with a kind of cynical or detachment in an alien affair of heart. An eerie playfulness is indeed a recurring trait in Browning's individual feeling about Nature; the uncanny playfulness of wild creature of boundless night only half intelligible to man, which man contemplates with mingled joy, wonder and fear. Joy, when the brown old Earth wears her good gigantic smile of an autumn morning; wonder, when he watches the 'miracles wrought in play in the teeming life of the Campagna; fear, when, on a hot August midnight, Earth tosses stormily on her couch. And all these notes of feelings are struck with an intensity and boldness of invention which make it unique among his writings, in the



great romantic legend of *Childe Roland*. What the *Ancient Mariner* is in the poetry of the mysterious terrors and splendours of the sea, that *Childe Roland* is in the poetry of bodeful horror, of haunted desolation, of waste and plague, ragged distortion, and rotting ugliness in landscape. The Childe, like the Mariner, advances through an atmosphere and scenery of steadily gathering menace ; the 'starved ignoble' Nature, 'peerish and dejected among her scrub of thistle and dock, grows malignant ; to the barren waste succeed spiteful little river with its drenched despairing willows, the blood trampled mire and wrecked torture-engine, the poisonous herbage and palsied oak, and finally the mountains, ignoble as the plain—'mere ugly heights and heaps', ranged round the deadly den of the Dark Tower. But Browning's horror world differs from Coleridge's in the pervading sense that the powers which control its issue are 'at play'. The catastrophe is not the less tragic for that ; but the heroic knight is not a culprit who has provoked the vengeance of his pursuers, but a quarry whose course they follow with grim half-suppressed laughter as he speeds in to the trap.

The hoary cripple cannot hide his malicious glee, the 'stiff blind horse' is as grotesque as he is woeful, the dreary day it self, as it sinks, shoots one grim red leer at the doomed knight as he sets forth ; in the pennury and inertness of the wasted plain he sees 'grimace' ; the mountains flight like bulls or doze like dotards ; and the Dark Tower itself is 'round and squat', built of brown stone, a mere anticlimax to romance ; while round it the sportsman assembled to see the end :

The hills, like giants at the hunting lay  
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay.

### The Gist of the Poem

The story of a knight who has undertaken a pilgrimage to a certain dark tower, the way to which was full of difficulties and dangers, and the right road quite unknown to the seeker. Those who had preceded him on the path had all failed and he himself is no sooner fairly engaged in the quest than he is filled with despair, but is impelled to go on. At the stage of his journey which is described in the poem he meets a hoary cripple, who gives directions which he consents to follow, though with misgivings. The day was drawing to a close, the road by which he entered on the path to the tower was gone ; when he looked



back, nothing remained but to proceed. Nature all around was starved and ignoble : flowers there were none ; some weeds that seemed to thrive in the wilderness only added to its desolation dock leaves with holes and rents, grass as hair in leprosy ; and wandering on the gloomy plain, one stiff, blind horse, all starved and stupefied, looking as if he were thrust out of the devil's stud. The pilgrim tried to think of a earlier, happier sights : of his friend Cuthbert—alas ! one night's disgrace left him without that friend ; of Giles, the soul of honour, who became a traitor, spit upon and curst. The present horror was better than these reflections on the past. And now he approached a petty, yet spiteful river, over which black scrubby alders hung, with willows that seemed suicidal. He forded the stream, fearing to set his foot on some dead man's cheek : the cry of the water-rat sounded as the shriek of a baby. And as he toiled on he saw that ugly heights (mountains seemed too good a name to give such hideous heaps) had given place to the plain, and two hills in particular, couched like two bulls in fight, seemed to indicate the place of the tower. Yes ! in their midst was the round, squat turret, without a counterpart in the whole world. The sight was as that of the rock which the sailor sees too late to avoid the crash that wrecks his ship. The very hills seemed watching him ; he seemed to hear them cry, "Steb and end the creature !" A noise was everywhere, toiling like a bell ; he could hear the names of the lost adventuress who had preceded him. There they stood to see the last of him. He saw and knew them all, yet dauntless set the horn to his lips and blew, "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.*"

## 2. CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

### Critical Remarks on the Poem

In Caliban upon Setebos the poet deals with the religion of a primitive. The deity Setebos whom Caliban evolves from his own mind is really the deity worthy of a savage. The primitive finds in Setebos the quality that he himself cherished in his own personal life. Since it is the deity of a brutal savage, it is deficient and completely destitute of moral virtues. In Setebos Caliban finds all those qualities and virtues which he himself had desired to have in his life. The poem shows that each man has the God whom he deserves. As Caliban's deity is created completely out of his own nature, the motives described to him are those upon



which Caliban himself would have acted in his life. The deity destroys his teachers. "Loving not, hating not, just choosing so," that is the earliest of Browning's religious poems presenting the attitude savage in matters of religion.

It is no accident that the *Death in the Desert* is followed immediately by a theological study in a very different key, *Keliban upon Scabos*. For in this brilliantly original "dramatic monologue" Caliban—the "savage men"—appears "mooting the point 'what is God'?" and constructing his answer frankly from his own nature. It was quite in Browning's way to take a humorous delight in imagining grotesque parallels to ideas and processes in which he profoundly believed; a proclivity aided by the curious subtle relation between his grotesquerie and his seriousness which makes *Pacchiarotto*, for instance, closely similar in effect to parts of *Christmas-Eve*. Browning is one of three or four sons of the nineteenth century who dared to fill in the outlines, or to complete the half told tale, of Shakespeare's Caliban. Renan's hero is the quondan disciple of Stephano and Trinculo, finished and matured in the corrupt mob-politics of Europe; a caustic symbol of democracy, as Renan saw it, alternately trampling on and patronising culture. Browning's Caliban is far truer to Shakespeare's conception; he is the Caliban of Shakespeare, not followed into a new phase but observed in a different attitude,—Caliban of the days before the storm, an unsophisticated creature of the island, inaccessible to the wisdom of Europe, and not yet the dupe of its vice. His wisdom, his science, his arts, are, all his own. He anticipates the heady joy of Stephano's bottle with a mash of gourds of his own invention. And his religion too is his own,—no decoction from any of the recognised vintages of religious thought, but home-made brew cunningly distilled from the teeming animal and plant life of the island. It is a mistake to call Caliban's theology a study of primitive religion; for primitive religion is inseparable from the primitive tribe, and Caliban the savage who has never known society was a conception as unhistorical as it was exquisitely adapted to the individualist ways of Browning's imagination.

Tradition and prescription, which fetter the savage with iron bonds, exist for Caliban only in the form of the faith held by his dan, which he puts aside in the calm decisive way of a modern thinker, as one who has nothing to fear from the penal-



ties of heresy, and has even outlived the exultation of free thought :—

“His dam held that the Quiet made all things  
Which Setebos vexed only : holds not so ;  
Who made them weak, made weakness He might  
vex.”

Caliban's theology has, more over, very real points of contact with Browning's own. His God is that sheer Power which Browning from the first recognised ; it is because Setebos feels heat and cold, and is therefore a weak creature with ungratified wants, that Caliban decides there must be behind him a divinity that “all it hath a mind to, doth.” Caliban is one of Browning's most consummate realists ; he has the remorselessly vivid perceptions of a Lippo Lippi and a sludge.

Browning's wealth of recondite animal and plant lore is nowhere else so amazingly displayed ; the very character of beast or bird will be hit off in a line,—as the pie with the long tongue

“That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,  
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,”

or the lumpish sea-beast which he blinded and called Caliban (an admirable trait)—

“A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.”

And all this curious scrutiny is reflected in Caliban's god. The sudden catastrophe at the close,

(“What, what ? A curtain o'er the world at once!”)

is one of Browning's most superb surprises, breaking in upon the leisured ease of theory with the suddenness of a horrible practical emergency, and compelling Caliban, in the act of repudiating his theology to provide its most vivid illustration.

Shakespeare, with bitter irony brought his half taught savage into touch with scum of modern civilisation, and made them conspire together against its benignity and wisdom. The reader is apt to remember this conjunction when he passes from *Caliban* to *Mr Sludge*. Stephano and Trinculo, almost alone among Shakespeare's rascals, are drawn without geniality, and Sludge is the only one of Browning's “Casuists” whom he treats with open scorn. That some of the effects were palpably fraudulent, and that, fraud apart, there remained a residuum of pheno-



mena not easy to explain, were all irritating facts. Yet no one can mistake *Sludge* for an outflow of personal irritation, still less for an act of literary vengeance upon the imposter who had beguiled the lofty and ardent intelligence of his wife. The resentful husband is possibly there, but so elementary an emotion could not possibly have taken exclusive possession of Browning's complex literary faculty, or baulked the eager speculative curiosity which he brought to all new and problematic modes of mind. His attitude towards spiritualism was in fact the product of strangely mingled conditions.

Himself the most convinced believer in spirit among the poets of his time, he regarded the bogus demonstrations of the "spiritualist" somewhat as the intellectual sceptic regards the shoddy logic by which the vulgar unbeliever proves there is no God. But even this anger had no secure tenure in a nature so rich in solvents for disdain. It is hard to say where scorn ends and sympathy begins, or where the indignation of the believer who sees his religion travestied passes over into the curious interest of the believer who recognises its dim distorted reflection in the unlikeliest quarters. But *Sludge* is clearly permitted, like *Blougram* before and *Juan* and *Hohenstiel-Schwangan* after him, to assume in good faith positions, or at least to use, with perfect sincerity, language, which had points of contact with Browning's own. He has an eye for "spiritual facts" nonetheless genuine in its gross way that it has been acquired in the course of professional asset. But his supernaturalism at its best is devoid of spiritual quality. His "spiritual facts" are collections of miraculous coincidences ranked together by the anteaters' tongue of a cool egoist, who waits for him

"Lazily alive,  
Open mounted,.....  
Letting all nature's loosely guarded motes  
Settle and, slick, be swallowed."

Like *Caliban*, who also finds the anteater an instructive symbol, he sees "the superuatural" everywhere, and everywhere concerned with himself. But *Caliban's* religion of terror, cunning, and cajolery is more estimable than *Sludge's* business-like faith in the virtue of wares for which he finds so profitable a market, and which he gets on such easy terms. *Caliban*



tremblingly does his best to hitch his waggon to Setebos's star—when Setebos is looking ; Sludge is convinced that the stars are once for all hitched to his waggon ; that heaven is occupied in catering for his appetite and becoming an accomplice in his sins. Sludge's spiritual world was genuine for him, but it had nothing but the name in common with that of the poet of Ben Ezra, and of the *Epilogue* which immediately follows.

### A Critical note on the Theology of the Poem

The object of the poem is to rebuke the anthropomorphic idea of God as it exists in minds of a narrow and revolving type. It is not a satire upon Christianity, as has been sometimes declared, but is an attempt to trace the evolution of the concrete idea of God in a coarse and brutal type of mind. Man from his advent on the earth has everywhere occupied himself in creating God in his own image and likeness ;

“Make us a god, said man :  
Power first the voice obeyed ;  
And soon a monstrosous form  
Its worshippers dismayed.”

The motto of the poem shows us how much nobler was the Hebrew Conception of God than that of the nations who knew him not. The poem opens with Caliban talking to himself in the third person, while he sprawls in the mire and is cheating Prospero and Miranda, who think he is at work for them. He begins to speculate on the Supreme Being—Setebos : he thinks His dwelling-place is the moon, thinks He made the sun and moon, but not the stars—the clouds and the island on which he dwells ; he has no idea of any land beyond that which is bounded by the sea. He thinks creation was the result of God being ill at ease. The cold which he hated and which He was powerless to change impelled Him. So he made the trees, the birds and creeping things and made everything in spite He could not make a second self to be His mate, but made in envy, Kistlessness or sport all the things which filled the island as play things. If Caliban could make a live bird out of clay, he would laugh if the creature broke his brittle clay leg ; he would play with him, being his and merely clay. So he (Setebos). It would neither be right nor wrong in him, neither kind nor cruel—merely an act of the Divine Sovereignty. If Caliban saw a procession of crabs



marching to the sea, in mere indifferent playfulness he might feel inclined to let twenty pass and then stone the twenty-first, pull off a claw from one with purple spots, give a worm to a third fellow, and two to another whose nippers end in red, all the while "Loving not, hating not, just choosing so !" [Apart from revelation, mankind has not reached the conception of the Fatherhood of God, whose tender mercies are over all His works. The Gods of the heathen are gods of caprice of malice and purposeless interference with creatures who are not the sheep of their pastures, but the play things of unloving Lords.] But he will suppose God is good in the main ; He has even made things which are better than Himself, and is envious that they are so, but consoles Himself that they can be nothing without Him. If the pipe which, blown through, makes a scream like a bird, were to boast that it caught the birds, and made the cry the maker could not make, he would smash it with his foot. That is just what God Setebos does ; so Caliban must be humble, or pretend to be. But why is Setebos cold and ill at ease ? Well, Caliban thinks there may be a something over Setebos, that made Him, something quiet, impassible—call it The Quiet. Beyond the stars he imagines The Quiet to reside, but is not much concerned about It. He plays at being simple in his way—makes believe ; so does Setebos. His mother, Sycorax, thought The Quiet made all things, and Setebos only troubled what The Quiet made. Caliban does not agree with that. If things were made weak and subject to pain they were made by a devil, not by a good or indifferent being. No ! weakness and pain meant sport to Him who created creatures subject to them. Setebos makes things to amuse himself, just as Caliban does ; makes a pile of turfs and knocks it over again. So Setebos. But He is a terrible as well as a malicious being ; His hurricanes, His high waves, His lightnings are destructive, and Caliban cannot contend with His force, neither can he tell that what pleases Him to-day will do so to-morrow. We must all live in fear of Him therefore, till haply The Quiet may conquer Him. All at once a storm comes, and Caliban feels that he was a fool to give at Setebos. He will lie flat and love Him, will do penance, will cat no wheelks for a month to appease Him.

There are, few, if any, systems of theology which escape one or other of the arrows of this satire. Anthropomorphism in greater or less degree is inseparable from our conceptions of the



Supreme. The abstract idea of God is impossible to us, the concrete conception is certain to err in making God to be like ourselves. That the Almighty must in Himself include all that is highest and noblest in the soul of man is a right conception, when we attribute to Him our weaknesses and failings we are but as Caliban. The doctrine of election, and the hideous doctrine of reprobation, are most certainly aimed at in the line—

“Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.”

The doctrine of reprobation is thus stated in the Westminster confession of Faith, iii. 7. “The rest of mankind (i. e. all but the elect) God was pleased, according to unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereley He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His creatures to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin to the praise of his glorious grace.” Calvin, in his *Institute of the Christian Religion*, taught that “God has predestinated some to eternal life, while the rest of mankind are predestinated to condemnation and eternal death” (Encyc. Brit. iv., art. ‘Calvin’ p. 720).

### The Gist of the Poem

“*Caliban upon Setebos*” carries us into an opposite sphere of thought. It has for its text these words from Psalm 50 : *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself* : and is the picture of an acute but half savage mind, building up the Deity on its own pattern. Caliban is much exercised by the government of the world, and by the probable nature of its ruler; and he has filched an hour from his tasks, on a summer noon, when Prospero and Miranda are taking his diligence upon trust, to go and sprawl full length in the mud of some cave, and talk the problem out.

The attitude is described, as his reflections are carried on, in his own words ; but he speaks as children do, in the third person. Caliban worships Setebos, god of the Patagonians, as did his mother before him ; but her creed was the higher of the two, because it included what his mother does not: the idea of a future life. He differs from her also in a more original way. For she held that a greater power than Setebos had made the world, leaving Setebos merely to “vex” it : while he contends that whoever made the world and its weakness, did so for the pleasure of vex-



ing it himself ; and that this greater power, the "Quiet" if it really exists, is above pain or pleasure, and had no motive for such a proceeding.

Setebos is thus, according to Caliban, a secondary divinity. He may have been created by the Quiet or may have driven it off the field ; but in either case his position is the same. He is one step nearer to the human nature which he cannot assume. He lives in the moon, Caliban thinks, and dislikes its "cold," while he cannot escape from it. To relieve his discomfort, half in impatience, half in sport, he has made human beings ; thus giving himself the pleasure of seeing others do what he cannot, and of mocking them as his playthings at the same time.

This theory of creation is derived from Caliban's own experience. In like manner, when he has got drunk on fermented fruits, and feels he would like to fly, he pinches up a clay bird, and sends it into the air ; and if its leg snaps off, and it entreats him to stop the smarting, or make the leg grow again, he may give it two more, or he may break off the remaining one ; just to show the thing that he can do with it what he likes.

He also presumes that Setebos is envious, because *he* is so ; as for instance : if he made a pipe to catch birds with, and pipe boasted : "I catch the birds. I make a cry which my maker can't make unless he blows through me," he would smash it on the spot.

For the rest he imagines that Setebos, like himself, is neither kind nor cruel, but simply acts on all possible occasions as his fancy prompts him. The one thing which would arouse his own hostility, and therefore that of Setebos, would be that any creature should think he is ever prompted by anything else ; or that his adopting a certain course one day would be a reason for following it on the next.

Guided by these analogies—which he illustrates with much quaintness and variety—Caliban humours Setebos, always pretending to be envious of him, and never allowing himself to seem too happy. He moans in the sunlight, gets under holes to laugh, and only ventures to think aloud, when out of sight and hearing, as he is at the present moment. Thus sheltered, however, he makes too free with his tongue. He risks the expression of a hope that old age or the Quiet, will some day make an end



of his Creator whom he loves none the better for being so like himself. And in another moment he is crouching in object fear :

For an awful thunderstorm has broken out.

"That raven scudding away 'has told him all."

"Lo ! Lieth flat and loveth Setebos !" (vol. vii, P. 171)

and will do anything to please him so that he escape this time.

The most impressive of the dramatic monologues "A Death in the Desrt," detaches itself from this double group. It is contemplative in tone, but inspired by a formed conviction, and, dramatically at least, by a instructive purpose ; and thus becomes the centre of another small division of Mr. Browning's poems, which for want of a less ugly and hackneyed word we may call "didactic."

### 3. MEETING AT NIGHT

#### AND

### 4. PARTING AT MORNING

## Critical Substance and Appreciation

The dramatic lyric in two parts called *Meeting at Night* and *Parting at Morning* contains only sixteen lines and is a flawless masterpiece.....The first part of Browning's lyric is notable for its shortness, its breadth and its depth ; the second part possess these qualities even more notably, and also takes the reader's thoughts into a world entirely outside the limits of time and space. The impressionistic colours in this poem add much to its effect ; the grey sea, the black land, the yellow moon, the firey ringlets, the blue sport of the match, the golden light of morning. The sounds and smells are realistic ; one hears the boat cut harshly into the slushy land ; the sharp scratch of the match ; one inhales the thick, heavy odour radiating from the sea-scented beach that has absorbed all day the hot rays of the sun.

The dramatic contrast in this poem is simply this : The passionate intensity of love can not be exaggerated ; in the night's meeting all other thoughts, duties and pleasures are as though they were not ; but with the day comes the imperious



call of life, and even if the woman could be content to live forever with her lover in the lonely cottage, he could not ; he loves her honesty with fervour and sincerity, but he simply must go out into the world where men are, and take his share of the excitement and the struggle ; he would soon be absolutely miserable if marooned from life, even with the woman he loves .....In this poem Browning represents facts as they are ; it is not simply that the man wants to go out and live among other men, it is general law that he must. Just as the sun must take his prescribed course through the sky, so must I run my circle of duties in the world of men. It is not a moral call of duty ; it is the importunate full of necessity.

Now it is just possible that we could interpret "need" in another sense, with an inversions ; "the world of men needs me, and I must go to do my share." This would make the man perhaps nobler, but surely not so natural ; indeed it would sound like a priggish excuse to leave his mistress. The nature picture of the dawn is absolutely perfect. He does not say that finally the cape become visible, but that the sea suddenly come round the cape. (Phelps).

*Meeting at Night and Parting at Morning.* (originally published as Night And Morning in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics, Bells and Pomegranates*, vii. : 1845.) The speaker is a man who joyfully seeks his happy seaside home at night, where he rejoins the wife from whom the demands of his daily work have separated him. In the sequel (*Parting at Morning*) the rising sun calls men to work : the man of the poem to work of a lucrative character ; and excites in the woman (if we interpret the slightly obscure line correctly) a desire for more society than the seaside home affords. Commentators on these poems have evidently "jumped the difficulty."

### The Gist of the Poem

"Meeting At Night" is a glimpse of moonlight and repose ; and of the appropriate seclusion in the company of the one woman loved.

"Parting At Morning" asserts the need of "men" and their "world" which is born again with the sunshine.



## 5. A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

**Critical Remarks on the Poem**

In the presence of perfect love words are often superfluous, wild, and hurtful ; words lead to debate, debate to contention, striving, weeping. Even truth becomes falseness ; for it the heart is consecrated by a pure affection, love is the only truth ; and the chill of logic and the precision of definition can be no other than harmful ; therefore hush the talking, pry not after the apples of the knowledge of good and evil, or Eden will surely be in peril. The only knowledge is the charm of Love's protecting embrace, the only language is the speech of love, the only thought to think the loved one's thought one absolute sacrifice of the whole self on the altar of love ; but before the altar can be approached sorrow must be buried, a little weeping has to be done ; the morrow shall see the offering presented,—“the might of love” will drown alike both hopes and fears.

**The Gist of the Poem**

“A Woman's Last Word” is one of moral and intellectual self-surrender. She has been contending with her husband, and been silenced by the feeling, not that the truth is on his side, but that it was not worth the pain of such a contention. What, she seems to ask herself, is the value of truth, when it is false to her Divinity ; or Knowledge, when it costs her Eden ? She begs him whom she worships as well as loves, to mould her to himself ; but she begs also the privilege of a few tears—a last tribute, perhaps, to her sacrificed conscience, and her lost liberty.

## 6. MISCONCEPTIONS

**Critical Remarks on the Poem**

*Misconceptions.* (Men and Women, 1855 ) a beautiful fancy of a branch on which a bird has rested a moment bursting into bloom for pride and joy that it has been so honoured. The poet treats it as symbolical of a heart which has thrilled for a moment under the smiles of a queen ere she went on to her true-love throne.

**The Gist of the Poem**

“Misconceptions” illustrates the false hopes which may be aroused in the breast of any devoted creature by an incidental and momentary acceptance of its devotion.



## 7. LAMENT FOR VANISHED BEAUTY

## Introductory Remarks

This poem occurs in the fourth book of *Paracelsus*, Browning's first dramatic poem of importance, which appeared in 1835. "Paracelsus is the mediaeval scholar and physician whose history Browning has told us in a form which is something between drama and narrative. His ambitions and desires, boundless like those of Faustus, are concentrated upon the attainment of universal knowledge. This song records the passing of his earlier ideals.

"Still dreams

They are, so let them vanish, yet in beauty,  
If that may be. Stay : thus they pass in song !"

Paracelsus imagines himself making a pyre of fragrant spices on which his old ideals are to be consumed. See Mr. Fowler's notes appended to the text. Paracelsus was a German physicist of the sixteenth century, a contemporary of Dr. Faustus. His father taught him the rudiments of alchemy, surgery, and medicine. He studied philosophy under several learned masters. He acquired a taste for occult sciences and formed a determination to use them for the welfare of mankind. He is rightly termed "the father of modern chemistry."

## Criticism

As Mr. Fowler remarks, "Nowhere else, does Browning effect so much merely by the associations of words—the names of spices hardly less odorous than the spices themselves—and by a concentrated economy of language which reaches its climax in the monosyllables of the first line." "One might well imagine that Keats had written the song in which memories are distilled into perfumes."

## Title.

The title signifies the speaker's (Paracelsus's) lament for the passing of his old artistic ideals which are imagined to be consumed on a pyre of fragrant spices.

## Summary.

Paracelsus imagines himself making a pyre of fragrant spices, cassia, sandal, ladanum, aloewood smeared with spikenard and other aromatic substances, upon which his old artistic ideals are to be consumed. He is to disseminate the faint odour from the spices used to embalm an Egyptian mummy.



## 8. DE GUSTIBUS

## Introductory Remarks.

This poem first appeared in Browning's '*Dramatic Lyrics*' published in 1842, and later on it was included in his '*Men and Women*' in 1855. (See the Introductory Remarks on '*Home thoughts from Abroad*') This is one of the finest dramatic lyrics of Browning. It should be read along with his '*Home thoughts from Abroad*' and '*The Englishman in Italy*'. "*De Gustibus*—" is a sort of connecting link between the two points. The first stanza with its raptures over English May and June reminds one naturally of '*Home thoughts from Abroad*' while the second stanza delineating various Italian sceneries reminds us of the vivid picture of Italian peasant-life on the plain of Sorrento which we find in '*The Englishman in Italy*'. "*De Gustibus*—" has another interest. Some critics consider it to be autobiographical in spirit, in it we find Browning, they think, speaking for his own tastes. That is really interesting so far as it goes. Because, it is very seldom that we catch Browning speaking for himself. He had a great love for Italy, for Italian scenery and art. But it is very seldom that he gave expression to this love. And, so far as we know, Browning did not think much of Italian politics, and problems, contrasting himself thus, with Mrs. Browning, whose *casa guidi windows* (1851) deals enthusiastically with Italian politics. As a matter of fact, he was more interested in individual Italian men or women, artists and dreamers, than with the so-called momentous problems.

Curiously enough we find in "*De Gustibus*—" one vivid reference to Italian politics. But we would be really going too far in taking the poem as autobiographical. It would be more to the purpose to think that just as in *Home thoughts from Abroad* Browning tries to feel English scenery as an Englishman does so also in "*De Gustibus*—" he adopts the standpoint of an Italian and feels Italian scenery "as an Italian might be supposed to feel it" After all, we must not forget that it is a *dramatic lyric* not a pure lyric—"Lyrical in *form* but dramatic in *principle*."

## Title.

The title of the poem is incomplete. The latin words '*de gustibus*' simply mean '*of tastes*.' They are the first two words of the well-known Latin saying—*de gustibus non est disputandum*," "there is no disputing about tastes." By leaving title



incomplete Browning wanted to suggest the rest of the saying. Even in this one finds a characteristic touch, a tinge of that singular love of oddity and puzzles for which Browning is famous. The full title is quite apt, as the poem illustrates the difference of tastes.

### Central thought.

The poem illustrates a supposed Italian's fondness for different kinds of Italian scenery as contrasted with a supposed English man's undying love for English scenery. And the moral is that there is no accounting for or disputing about difference of tastes. If the Italian prefers the grandeur and gauntness of Italian scenes to the soft beauty of the English spring, he is not at fault.

### Criticism.

Some part of the appeal of this charming poem is bound to be lost on us as we are neither Englishmen nor Italians. But a thing of beauty is a joy for ever. There is nobody who would be so "dull of soul" as to pass by the delicate beauty of the moonlit English scenes of the first stanza, or the more detailed and vivid pictures of Italian scenes drawn in the second stanza. Browning's pictorial art is at its best here. From the profusion and breathlessness of 'a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies' to the meagreness and suggestiveness of 'one sharp tree—' 'tis a cypress—stands.' This art is all success. The poem is a web of lines and colours, all vivid and fine. But it has an assured spring and vitality too. The zest of a genuine lover is here, and his buoyant enthusiasm. Towards its end the poem suddenly changes in to a rapid, small, one act drama, throwing a sudden sidelight on Italian political life. How successfully is the 'girl with green-flesh melons' and her stirring news introduced! There is everything in the poem that an Italian of that time would love and dream of, not only the gorgeousness and grimness of Italian scenery, but also the dream of freedom of the nascent Italian heart. The cry 'Italy, my Italy!' has all the passionateness of the romantic cry for "the south, the sweet south," and for Italia, O Italia! Thus the poem has an organic fulness which a careful analysis reveals.

Not less remarkable is the musical quality of the poem. The delicate tinkling tune of the following lines, dying away softly, has seldom been surpassed—



“Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,  
And let them pass, as they will too soon,  
With the bean-flower’s boon  
And the blackbird’s tune  
And May and June !”

### Summary.

“Some one is apostrophizing a friend, whose ghost he is convinced will be found haunting an English lane, with its adjoining corn-field and hazel coppice, where lovers meet and where in early summer the blackbird sings: and the bean-flower scents the air. And he declares at the same time that Italy is the land of his own love, whether his home there be a castle in the Appenine, some house on its southern shore; among “wind-grieved” heights, or on the edge of an opaque blue sea: amidst a drought and stillness in which the very cicala dies, and the cypress seems to rust; and scorpions drop and crawl from the peeling walls, and where “a bare-footed girl tumbles green melons on to the ground before you, and she gives news of the last attack on the Bourbon King of Italy.” The poem ends with an evocation of Italy, professing undying love for the land.

### 9. THE FLOWER’S NAME

#### Critical Remarks.

The poem is included in Browning’s *Dramatic Lyrics* and was first published in *Hood’s Magazine*, July, 1844. It is an exquisite lyric, in which a lover’s impressions on his lady love are recorded with a passionate glow and sincerity of love.

#### Substance.

A lover visits a garden, and recalls a previous walk therein with the woman he loved. The wicket in the garden-gate with moss-covered hinges swung back with a murmur when she turned. An unfortunate snail, spurned by the lover’s foot, was tenderly laid aside by her. She trod upon the gravel-walk: there she pointed out to him a moth on the milk-white phlox. But she did not pass by the roses, which are an emblem of love. She stopped at another flower, whose name—“a soft, meandering Spanish name”—she gave him; he must learn Spanish ‘only for that slow, sweet name’s sake.’ The very roses are beautiful so far as they till her footsteps. In the beauty of the lady the flowers are beautiful, and devoid of her, they have no significance.



## 10. RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

**Critical Remarks.**

The poem was at first included in Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics*, but since transferred to his *Men and Women*. Geoffrey de Rudel was Provesal gentleman who was presented to Frederick Barbarossa in 1154. He was troubadour. Sismondi gives the following account of Rudel :—

“The knight who had returned from the Holy Land spoke with enthusiasm of a Countess of Tripoli, who had extended to them the most generous hospitality, and whose grace and virtue equalled her virtues. Geoffrey Rudel, hearing this account, fell deeply in love with her without having ever seen her, and prevailed upon one of his friends, Bertrand d’Allamanon, a troubadour like himself, to accompany him to the levant. In 1162 he quitted the court of England, whither he had been conducted by Geoffrey, the brother of Richard I, and embarked for the Holy Land. On his voyage he was attacked by a severe illness and had lost the power of speech when he arrived at the port of Tripoli. The Countess, being informed that a celebrated poet was dying of love for her on board a vessel which was entering the roads, visited him on a shipboard, took him kindly by the hand and attempted to cheer his sprits. Rudel, we are assured, recovered his speech sufficiently to thank the countess for her humanity, and to declare his passion, when his expressions of gratitude were silenced by the convulsions of death. He was buried at Tripoli, beneath a tomb of porphyry which the Countess raised to his memory, with an Arabic inscription.” Previous to his last voyage, Rudel composed these verses on *Distant love* :

“Angry and sad shall be my way,  
If I behold not her afar ;  
And yet I know not what that day  
Shall rise—for still she dwells afar.  
God ! who hast formed this fair array  
Of worlds, and placed my love afar ;  
Strengthen my heart with hope, I pray  
Of seeing her I love afar.  
Oh lord ! believe my faithful lay,  
For well I will love her, though afar;  
Though but one blessing may repay  
The thousands griefs I feel afar,



No other love shall shed its ray  
On me, if not this love afar ;  
A brighter one, where'er I stray  
I shall not see, or near, or far."

### Substance.

There was a Mount, first visited by the sun and last left by it, which was capped with snow. There was a flower blooming down the mount, not perceived by the sun. This flower, in the constant effort of imitating the sun, lost all its grace. People gave various names to the mount and playfully called the flower sunflower. Rudel chooses for his badge the sunflower, which, by ever turning towards the sun, has parted with the graces of a flower to become a mimic sun. He says that men feed on his songs ; but the sunflower's concern is not for the bees, which gather the sweetness of the flower's breast,—its concern is solely for the sun. A lady of Tripoli is his sun of the East and to the East he longingly turns, because there his lady dwells afar.

### Paraphrase.

I know a Mount, which the generous sun visits first and leaves last. But it is favoured in vain, because it does not repay the perpetual county of the sun by any change of its solemn front of snow. Underneath that Mount there was a flower blooming unperceived by the sun, which constantly changes its position at its progress through the sky. In the baffled attempt at living the life of the sun, the flower has gradually been shorn of all the beauties of a flower and has been turned, in the course of its foolish endeavour, to a flower with florets like the shooting rays and a face like disc of the sun.

Men gave many a noble name to that Mount as over many lands its calm front of snow-like a protecting shield was raised and old and new names vied with each other. Men playfully called the flower the sunflower.

O angel of the East (the beautiful lady of Tripoli), condescend to cast one beneficent look across the distant waters upon this twilight nook of my heart ! Dear Pilgrim, are you bound for the East ? Go then, and in the course of your voyage proclaim that I, the Franch troudadour, Rudel, choose as my badge a sunflower, stretched out like a sacrifice before its idol. See in a hurry my inexperienced fingers have interfered with the fineness



of the picture I have woven. Weaving is an art which really belongs to women. But nothing has baffled me, and good or bad, here I have finished the picture. You proclaim that men like my sons like bees basking on the breast of flowers. But as the flower's concern is not for the bees but solely for the sun, so men praise Rudel but in vain. I, too, do not care for the praise of men, but always turn to the East, the East, where my beloved lady of Tripoli lives.

N. B. Note the exquisite imagery, passion and earnestness of the closing lines. Rudel's deep love for the lady of Tripoli is like a "desire of the moth for the star." But his unrealised ambition of a requital of his love has this deep significance and pathos that "a day will come, at least it will"—in some other distant birth—when this love will be fulfilled in another birth—this is the burden of Browning's *Evelyn Hope*.

#### 11. A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

##### Critical Remarks.

The poem 'spins out a thin melody which floats faintly over an ocean of ingenuity in composition, reflecting the momentary brilliance and fine moral slightness or insignificance of eighteenth century venice.' Baldassare Galuppi (1706-85) was a celebrated Italian composer, born in Venice. He was successful opera-writer and waked in London from 1741 to 1744. He went to Russia, where he lived at the court of the Empress Catherine II and contributed much to the improvement of music in that country. He next became organist of St. Mark's Venice. He died in 1785, and left fifty thousand lire to the poor of that city. The word *Toccata* means a *touch piece*; "it does but *touch* its theme rapidly, even superficially, for the most part; so that the interpolation of solemn chords and emotional phrases, in consistent with its traditional character, may naturally, by force of contrast, lead to some suggestion or recognition of many irregularities of life."

"The *Toccata* as a form of composition is not the measured, deliberate working-out of some central musical thought, as is the *Sonata* or *Sound-piece*, where the trained ear can flow out the whole process to its delightful and orderly consummation." Dr. Berdoc gives the flowing analysis of the poem: "The poem deals with two classes of human being—the mere pleasure talkers with their balls and masks (stanza iv) and the scientists (stanza viii) with their research and theologies. The Venetians—who



seemed to the poet merely born to blow and droop, who lived frivolous lives of gaiety and love making—lived lives which came to nothing, and did deeds better left undone—heard the music which dreamily told them they must die but went on with their kissing and their dancing till death took them where they never see the sun. The other class, immersed in the passion for knowledge, the class which despises the vanities and frivolities of the butterfly's life, and consecrates itself to science, not the less surely dissipates its energies and misses the true end of life if it has nothing higher to live for than Physics and Geology.

### Summary.

- Baldassaro Galuppi, the great Italian composer and opera-writer, is represented in the fine poem as singing one of his *toccatas* or *touch-pieces* before the venetian merchants and kings, known as *Doges*. The burden of his powerful song is the evanescence and futility of worldly pomp and grandeur. There was a time when Venice, the far famed "gateway of the East," enjoyed supremacy over all the richest countries of the Byzantine Empire. The Venetian merchants were highly rich; the *Doges* used to perform the grand annual ceremony, called *Spozalizio del mare*, in recognition of their supremacy over the Mediterranean. The city itself was full of an artery fine canals, which served as streets on which gondolas plied. When the sea was warm, the young Venetians used to enjoy the pleasures of ball dances and masks till quite a late hour in the night along with pretty young girls with superbly arched necks, highly decorated and richly dressed.

While Galuppi went on playing at his clavichord, young men and girls swore lifelong fidelity to one another. The clever musician passed on from plaintive note to another. The rich Venetians admired these mournful notes, but they failed to take their hint and act accordingly. The poet observes that Galuppi's was a funeral song in a feast,—it was like the creaking of a ghostly cricket over a house that was burning. It was a elegiac song over the inevitable ruin of a rich province which exhausted and ruined itself out of plentitude. It was a gay butterfly-life that the rich and arrogant Venetians led. Their crude materialistic hopes and aspirations took no account of the greatness and immortality of the soul. Galuppi will live because of his scholarship in Physics and Geology, but the pleasure-loving materialistic venetians are



doomed to oblivion. But the poet staggers at the pessimistic song of Galuppi, which, though it strikes a note of truth produces a chilly sensation in his heart. A creeping horror overtakes him to think that so much wealth, luxury and splendour will but lead to the grave. There is a sense of *tars* in things human and this fully illustrated from Galuppi's *toccata* about the inevitable doom of Venice, which paid no attention to the importance of the soul-element in man.

## 12. MAY AND DEATH

### Occasion.

This small poem was written in memory of one of Browning's boy companions, a cousin of his, whose name was Mr. Charles Silverthorne, otherwise known as Jim.

### Substance.

The five quatrains strike a very mournful note. The poet says that all the delights of spring (May) departed with the death of his friend, Charles. Yet he would like to have at least one plant of the woods in May, which has in its leaves a streak of spring's blood. Wherever the leaf grows in a wood, they know the red drop comes from the grief smitten heart of the poet.

N. B. The flower referred to is spotted *persicaria*, a common weed with purple stains upon its rather large leaves. "In consequence of the dark spot which marks the centre of every leaf belonging to this plant, popular tradition asserts that it grew beneath the cross, and received this distinction through the drops of blood which fell from the saviour's wounds touching its leaves". Cf. The popular poem—

"Those deep unwrought marks,  
The villager will tell you,  
Are the flower's portion from the atoning blood  
On Calvary dead. Beneath the cross it grew".

A similar tradition clings to many other flowers.

### Paraphrase.

When you died, Charles, last May, I wish that most of the delightful and pleasant things of spring should have departed for ever along with you and those that yet remained should have departed for me, too. It may be a foolish thought, and perhaps I should not indulge in it. There are many friends who go



arm in arm and enjoy the pleasant summer evenings with all their charms. So far as these gay friends are concerned, let the month of May retain all its beauties. Let their period of youth furnish them every pleasure as it once did for me. I heartily wish these friends good luck,—let them enjoy all the pleasant sights and sounds of nature. But let them spare only one little plant, a flowering plant of May, all green except only a crimson mark between its split leaves, which may be regarded as the blood of spring. This single plant the happy friends may well afford to forego. If this particular flowering plant is missed from a single wood, no very great loss would be entailed upon it. But so far as I am personally concerned, whenever I find the blood-stained leaf of this plant, a deep grief overtakes me—I am inevitably reminded of my dead young friend, and that is all.

### 13. ECHETLOS

#### The Story.

It is a stirring story of the spacious days of Rome. The Athenians and Plataeans under the great general Miltiades were engaged in a heavy battle against the Persians in 490 B. C. It is known as the celebrated battle of Marathon in which the national honour and existence of the Greeks were hard pressed by the enemy ; but wherever in the battlefield they were hard put to it, an unknown man driving a ploughshare was seen cutting down the enemy's vast hordes. At the end of the battle the Greeks were naturally anxious to know who this unknown benefactor to their country in a clown's dress was. The oracles were consulted, but they were not ready to give it out. But they gave an evasive reply, 'let the man be known by his deed,—let him be called the Holder of the Ploughshare. The great deed never grows small.

#### Critical Comment.

It is an appealing story in which the central idea is the greatness of a deed done and the anonymity of the person who achieved it. The ordinary conception of the world is to pay greater homage to the man who has already achieved fame ; but here is the instance of a man who was utterly unknown to the Hellenic people, who were highly benefited on a dire day of their national calamity. When they consulted the oracles to know the name of this unknown benefactor, they got an evasive



reply. It is not the doer of the deed, but the deed itself that should be taken into account. As the man wielded the plough share in mowing down the Persian ranks, he was called after the deed "The Holder of the Ploughshare." This is the meaning of the Greek people name Echetlos.

### Paraphrase.

Here is described a stirring story, which will make your hairs stand on an end. The ancient Greeks met the immense Persian hordes who had attacked them, defeated them in the battle of *Marathon*, and having achieved this noble deed, saved the world from falling into the hands of the barbarians. Every Greek warrior most manfully fought that day and made his way through the enemy's ranks. The spearmen played his murderous game right dexterously, having hewn down men on all sides and like a wind swept wood full of swinging trees, all the spear-arms were at work that day.

But there was one man who did not belong to the Greek ranks and fought with no spear. He came and went like flash of lightning ; he was sometimes in the vanguard and sometimes in the rear-guard. He shone prominently here and there and imparted a lively inspiration into the hearts of Greek fighters. He had no helmet and no shield. He had only a goat-skin on and his limbs were broad and bare like those of a boorish peasant who tills the soil. Like a peasant, too, he mowed down the Persians with a ploughshare.

The unknown man was ubiquitous in his attendance everywhere in the battlefield. If the middlepart of the army was hard pressed like the oceanic fish on which the shark throws its whole hugebody, or if the right wing of the Greek army fattered when their general Kallimachos dropped lifeless on a heap of the dead, or if the unswerving Greek phalanx betrayed any sign of confusion, this unknown men rushed to the rescue at the supreme hour of their need. The peasant ruthlessly mowed the Persians and cleared the Greek soil of the foreign invaders as he routed the Sakians and exterminated the Medes.

He achieved the deed and the battle of Marathon was won by the Greeks. But this man was to be seen nowhere—on the meadow, by the stream, or at the marsh, though a searching enquiry was made about him far and wide from the foot of the



mountain to the fringe of the sea-coast where the last of the enemy was killed. That strong-limbed clown, leather-strapped and brown, could not be seen blazing anywhere, though only a while ago he had been seen cutting down and backing the enemy with his ploughshare before which the glory and splendour of Persia succumbed.

In order to know the name of this man the Greeks consulted the oracle, which answered : "Do not care for the name at all. Only say that as the man was of great help to you, he ought to be called 'The Holder of the Ploughshare'. It was a great deed that he achieved and its glory will never vanish."

In fact, the great names have no value. Bewail the lot of selfish Miltiades and how he perished at the island of Paros. Bewail also the lot of the traitor Themistokles, who became a servile satrap in the enemy's court at Sardis and think of the clown, who rendered a supreme service to Greece under cover of anonymity.

#### 14. THE LABORATORY

##### Introductory Remarks.

The poem first appeared in Hood's Magazine, June, 1844, to which it was contributed to help Hood in his illness. It was afterwards published in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845). It was printed together with the *The Confessional* and the two pieces were named *France and Spain*. It is in the form of a dramatic monologue, a kind of poetry in which Browning particularly excelled. Browning gives us a terrible study of jealousy in *The Laboratory* the distorted love-frenzy of a woman who has been supplanted, which impels her to her rival's extinction. The scene is a chemist's laboratory in Paris under the Ancient Regime. The speaker, a woman who has been rejected by her lover, has come to the laboratory to obtain a dose of poison which she means to administer to her rival, and she watches the preparation of the poison with an eager, ferocious joy, dashed only by the fear of its being inadequate and bloats over the prospect of her revenge. "The chemist says nothing, but the contrast between the placid of the old scientist, intent only upon his work and the wildly passionate countenance of the woman with him, is sufficiently impressive.



Those were the days when murder was a fine art. She plans the public death of the woman she hates so that the lover will never be able to forget the dying face. Radiant in queenly beauty, with the smile of satisfaction that accompanies the inner assurance of beauty and power,—in a moment she will be convulsively rolling on the floor, her swollen face purplish-black with the poison, her mouth emitting foam like a mad dog. There is no doubt that the little murderess intends to follow her rival to tomb. She has given the chemist her entire fortune as pay for the drop of poison : he may kiss her, if he likes ! All shame, all womanly reserve are gone ; what does anything matter now ? It is a true study of jealousy because the little creature does not dream of attacking the *man* who deserted her ; all her hellish energy is directed against the woman. Indeed the poison that she buys will not transform her rival more completely than the dreadful poison of jealousy has already transformed her from what she was to what she is.”

In the poem, “a picture is given of the elementary methods of Italy to get rid of obstructive lives by poison. It is a presentment of mediaeval life displaying practices in the struggle for existence in the past, doubtless true of facts as the poet has gleaned then during his visit to Italy, and in the reading of outstanding lives of Italy’s past.” Dr. Berdoe has the following note on the art of poisoning practised in mediaeval and later Europe. “Although the effects of some of the deadliest poisons were well known to the ancients their detection and recovery from the body by chemical means is a branch of science of only modern discovery. The Greeks and the Romans were well acquainted with mercury, arsenic, henbane, aconite and hemlock.....the Greek and Roman physicians were quite incapable of such a knowledge of pathology as would enable them to detect any but the coarsest signs of poisoning in a dead body. Much less were they able to detect or recover by analysis the particular poison used by the criminal.....In the fourteenth century arsenic was generally employed. Of the great schools of poisoners which flourished in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Venice was the earliest.

Troublesome people were removed by the Council of Ten by means of convenient poisons...Mr. Browning’s poem introduces us to laboratory where an arsenical preparation is being prepared.



The glass mask referred to in the first line was used to protect the purchaser from the white, deadly smoke which the mineral gave off. The poison for which the lady paid so lavishly could be prepared nowadays by any chemist's apprentice for a few pence ; but, plentiful as it is, it is comparatively rarely used by criminals, as the same apprentice could infallibly detect it in the body after death, and reproduce in a test tube the very same poison used by the Criminals."

### Title.

The poem is entitled "The Laboratory : Ancient Regime" because the scene of the imaginary story is a chemist's laboratory in Paris under the Ancient Regime or during the seventeenth or eighteenth century before the Revolution (1789). The significance of the addition 'Ancient Regime' is that in those olden days poisoning was practised as a fine art and people who were troublesome or obnoxious were removed by convenient poison. Arsenic was the poison commonly employed, and in the present poem, too, the poison is arsenical preparation.

### Criticism.

*The Laboratory* belongs to a group of poems which have for their theme, jealousy, a distorted love-frenzy. It is true study of jealousy in as much as the woman does not even dream of attacking the man who has deserted her and directs all her hatred, her hellish energy against her successful rival. The story is told in the most powerful and concentrated manner. The jealous woman's whole soul is compressed into her words and actions ; her emotion is visible, her voice, subdued yet full energy, is audible in every line." The language and metre fit the thought. Tennyson passed a severe judgement on the first line. 'Now that I tying thy glass mask tightly' that it lacked smoothness, that it was very difficult mouthful. But such reggedness is intentional and absolutely right. The woman speaks slowly with compressed lips, her voice consumed with terrible hatred and the terrible resolution for revenge. The poet makes a very effective use of antithesis on the second verse of the poem. He is opposed to *her tears to laughter, one to them, the Church to the laboratory*. And there is the contrast, sufficiently impressive, between the placid face of old scientist, intent only upon his work, and the wildly passionate countenance of the little woman with him.



**Gist of the Poem.**

The theme of the poem is the distorted love-franzy of a woman who has come to a chemist's laboratory to buy poison to destroy her successful rival.

**Summary.**

A woman who has been supplemented maddened with jealousy has secured an interview with an alchemist in his laboratory that she may purchase a deadly poison which she means to administer to her rival. She watches the preparation of the poison in a glassmask which she has worn to protect herself from the fumes. While the chemist is engaged in his deadly task, she asks him questions about the secrets of his art. She wants to know which particular poison she will be given to administer to her rival. The "faint smokes curling whitely" enable us to ascertain the nature of the poison. It is an arsenical preparation. As she sits watching, she thinks that her rival and the man whose affections she has so cleverly entrapped could not even dream of her visit to the chemist's.

Although eager for her rival's destruction, she has no desire to hurry the manufacturer of the means of it. She can wait. With a fiendish delight, she gloats over the prospect of her revenge. She envies the chemist. If she could have so many deadly poisons as the chemist possesses, what a world of delights would surround her ! She would administer one poison to one person and another to a different person and they would not fail to produce the desired effect. She reveals in visions of murder. She wants the colour of the poison to be bright and tempting. The eager ferocious joy with which she watches the preparation of the poison is dashed by the fear of its being inadequate. "She has all the ideas of a big dose which the uninitiated think requisite for big patients. "She is not little—no minion like one !" what, only a drop ? she asks. She wishes that death should be felt and that the poison should 'brand, burn up,' so that the lover will never be able to forget the dying face. "Radiant in queenly beauty, with the smile of satisfaction that accompanies the inner assurance of beauty and power in a moment she will be convulsively rolling on the floor, her swollen face purplish-black with the poison, her mouth emitting foam like a mad dog." She is anxious to know if it hurts the victim. Is it likely to injure herself too ? Being



reassured on that point, she takes off the glass mask and for reward gives the chemist her entire fortune. He may kiss her besides, and on the mouth if he will. All shame, all womanly reserve are cast to the winds. But before she departs, she asks the old chemist to brush the dust of his laboratory off her garments, "lest horror it brings ere she knows it," the next time she goes to dance at the king's.

## 15. TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

### Introductory Remarks.

The poem was originally published in *Men and Women* in 1855. "The Campagna di Roma is that portion of the almost coinciding with the ancient latium, which lies round the city of Rome.....Anciently it was the seat of numerous cities and is now dotted with ruins in its whole extent.....There is a solemnity and beauty about the Campagna entirely its own. To the reflective mind, this ghost of old Rome is full of suggestion; its vast, almost limitless extent, as it seems to the traveller; its abundant herbage and floral wealth in early spring; its desolation, its crumbling monuments and its evidence of a vanished civilization, fill the mind with a sweet sadness, which readily awakens the longing for the infinite spoken of in the poem, the keynote of which is undoubtedly found in the lines—

"Only I discern  
Infinite passion, and the pain  
Of finite hearts that yearn."

Say Pascal: This desire and this weakness cry aloud to us that there was once in man a true happiness, of which there now remains to him but the mark and the empty trace, which he tries to fill from all that surround him; seeking from things absent the succour he finds not in things present; and these are all inadequate, because this infinite void can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object—that is to say, only by God himself." The Speaker in the poem says to the woman "I would that you were all to me". As pleasure, learning, wealth, have failed to satisfy the soul of man, so not even love, the holiest passion of the soul, can satisfy the human heart, which can rest in God alone. Dr. Martineau says that 'all finite loves are only *half born*, wandering in a poor twilight, unknowing of their peace and power, till they lie within the encompassing and glori-



fyng love of God. The restful music, the anodyne for the pain of yearning hearts, comes from no earth-born love however pure." (Dr. Berdoe)

Mr. Fowler observes : "The Roman Campagna, with its contrasts of 'passion' and 'peace'—the life of flowers and insects, so full of heat and energy, yet so brief and ineffectual, the ruins that speak at once of antiquity and of the brevity of the human generations ; the limitless plain stretching away out of sight turns the lover's thought to the baffling, enigma of life. How reconcile 'passion' and 'peace' ? The thought leads him on like the spider's thread, a clue which takes nowhere, though he traces it everywhere round him. He would fain lose his separate identity and become wholly absorbed in the beloved, but the finite bounds of our nature cannot be transcended ; we remain separate, the yearning is unfulfilled." See also *Notes* appended to the text.

### Central Thought.

The central thought of the poem is contained in the concluding words,

"Infinite passion, and the pain  
Of finite hearts that yearn."

The pain is that of a heart both restless and weary ; ever seeking to grasp the infinite in finite and ever eluded by it.

### Criticism.

The poem provides an exquisite expression for the longing for the infinite which we all feel but can not satisfy because the finite bounds of our nature cannot be transcended. It is "one of the most beautiful of Browning's poems.....Always experimenting with metre, he seems here to have found one that exactly suits the mood he wishes to express ; sense and sound harmonise so completely that there is no suggestion anywhere of a *tour-de force*, of a violence done to rhyme, rhythm or diction, such as often detracts from the charm of his verse ; and the poem reaches its perfect climax in the last two lines, which are the key to the whole and are among the great lines of poetry that have become a part of the English language." (Fowler)



**Summary.**

The sentiment of this poem can only be rendered in its concluding words :

“Infinite passion, and the pain,  
Of finite hearts that yearn.”

For its pain is that of a heart both restless and weary : ever seeking to grasp the definite in the finite, and ever eluded by it. The sufferer is a man. He longs to rest in the affection of a woman who loves him and whom he also loves ; but whenever their union seems complete his soul is spirited away, and he is adrift again. He asks the meaning of it all—where the fault lies if fault there be ; he begs her to help him to discover it. The Compagna is around them, with its endless fleece of feathery grasses,” its “everlasting wash of air” ; its wide suggestion of passion and of peace. The clue to the enigma seems to glance across him in the form of a gossamer thread. He traces it from point to point, by the objects on which it rests. But just as he calls his love to help him to hold it fast, it breaks off, and floats into the invisible. His doom is endless change. The tired, tantalized spirit must accept it.” (Mrs. Orr.)

**16. LOVE AMONG THE RUINS****Date and Book**

The poem was written in the winter of 1853-54 when the poet was on a visit to the Roman Campagna. The poem was included among the “fifty” which made up the poet’s *Men and Women*, published in two volumes in 1855. It occurred in volume I. The volume was prefaced by the dedication, *One Word More*, though it was put at the end. In redistributing some of the contents of these volumes, along with some others of *Bells and Pomegranates*, this poem was put in the class entitled ‘Dramatic Lyrics’.

**Background of the Poem : Roman Campagna**

*Love among the Ruins* has a scenic background of vast ruins in the Roman Campagna which the poet actually visited. The main thought of the poem is that “Love is triumphant over Time and Death”, and the thoughts of Time and Death are inspired by a view of “the ruins of aqueducts, vilas, and tombs”, spread over the Campagna.” The Campagna De Roma is that portion



of the area in Italy almost coinciding with the ancient Latium, which lies round the city of Rome.....Anciently it was the seat of numerous cities and is now dotted with ruins in its whole extent." The awful solemnity of the whole area is almost stupefying to the reflective mind. The ghost of an ancient civilization, of past grandeur and human ambition seems to haunt the vast area. "Its vast, almost limitless extent, as it seems to the traveller ; its abundant herbage and floral wreath in early spring ; its desolation and crumbling monument, and its evidences of a vanished civilization, fill the mind with a sweet sadness".

*Love Among the Ruins* should be read as a contrast and compliment to another love lyric, *Two in the Campagna* written by Browning in 1850 on an earlier visit to the same region. In that poem, his approach to love is quite different from the approach that we find in *Love Among the Ruins*. In *Two in the Campagna* the thought was that love between man and woman is finite like all other earthly things. The ruins of the Campagna speak to his mind that everything that man does or possesses is brief and ineffectual. Time and Death are superior to human passions and human generations. Consequently he loses faith in love also. "He would fain lose his separate identity and become wholly absorbed in the beloved, but the finite bounds of our nature cannot be transcended ; we remain separate, the yearning is unfulfilled." (Fowler)

*The Central Thought* of love among the Ruins—a thought conceived against the ruins of the Campagna—is quite opposed to the doubt and disbelief in the efficacy of love which we find in *Two in the Campagna*. The thought is that earthly ambitions and achievements are by their nature bound to end in ruins. But one thing lasts for ever—it is love. Love is the best thing on earth, because, in the conception of Browning, true love between man and woman has as great a future as the human soul itself.

### **Browning's love poems : His Conception of Love**

Browning's conception of love has been called "queer." Queer it may be in some of his poems because of his unquestioning faith in an after life and his bold optimism that any thing that is good in this life will find its consummation not here on this earth but in heaven—"or what is heaven for"? Love does not mean to Browning a gross, sensual appetite which feeds passionate desire, as it is the case with Byron ; it does not mean the fine frenzy of



the Cavalier poets—a fervent desire of the soul for fleshly charms; not even does it mean to him the exquisite sensuousness of Keats. It does not mean an undefined hankering of the soul after the Platonic ideal as it meant to Shelley. To Browning love meant a spiritual bliss—the very treasure of the soul. But it meant much more. The physical, fleshly side of love between man and woman, the fire of actual passion—these are not disdained by him; these are the elements that are transfused through the physique into the soul, and contribute to the ethereal feeling that elevates the soul into nobler perception, transcending the mere physical. It is a preparation for the life to come.

Browning's love poems are endless in variety and in these he "breaks away from all tradition. No abandoned romanticist, he well knows, like Johnson and Shakespeare, that 'Love is but one of many passions'. His grammarian, his rabbi, his saints, stand outside love in the ordinary sense. Yet his own hopes for mankind and much of his religious faith are heavily staked upon this gospel of love. Were that to prove illusory, what would be left of the 'optimist'? Browning seldom betrays a doubt about the revelation of love; a subject on which he muses with all possible sympathy and curiosity, concerning himself with strange cases and conjectures, and.....returning to the nation that love is not only man's chief happiness but also his chief ordeal" (Eltan).

### Substance of "Love among the Ruins"

*St. 1—4 On a part of the Campagna now scattered over with ruins once stood a big city with all its grandeur.*

The soft colour of the twilight beautifies the long stretches of solitary pasture lands. The sheep are returning to their folds, wandering leisurely about in the twilight across the pastures. It is said that this part of the land was once the site of a big city, the capital of the country, wherein its kings held their courts; they ruled over it or warred with distant lands (St. 1). But now there is not even one big tree over the whole country. Only some rivulets flow down the hills, and by their intersections mark out the grassy plots as separate patches of green. This was the spot where in ancient times stood the mighty palace of the kings with its tall towers; and a marble wall with a hundred broad gates surrounded the large city (St. 2). Now the site of the city is covered with the carpet-like



smooth green of plentiful grass in summer. The grass completely covers the ruins of the city, whose existence is guessed by a few blocks projecting upwards. Long ago the now ruined city was the habitation of a large number of men, whose hearts were cheered by the passion for glory or depressed by the fear of shame. Like all other people, they too made gold the cause of their glory or shame (St. 3). Now a single turret stands out which is all the remains of a lofty tower. It is overgrown with wild shrubs and covered with gourd creepers, and patches of flowering herbs peep through the clefts of the foundations of the tower. That tower once stood high in the midst of a circular race course along which chariots sped, while the monarchs and their wives and courtiers watched the games from that tower (St. 4).

*St. 5—7. The Speaker is a lover who is to meet his beloved on the turret. He feels that love is best.*

When twilight spreads out its quiet beauty around and the sheep, returned to their folds, are shut up to peaceful rest, and the hill sides and rivulets are obscured in the growing dark of the evening, a girl waits for the speaker, a lover, on the turret in breathless, dumb eagerness for his coming there to meet her. (St. 5). In the ancient times the king looked out from the turret upon the city and had a wide view of the temples on the mountains, columns in the spaces of the woodland paths, bridges, etc., and on the crowded subjects swarming the city. The girl, however, looks out only for her lover. When he will come to her, she will not speak to him but placing her hands on his shoulders look livingly at his face. They will rush into each other's arms in close speechless embrace (St. 6). The people of the city were both powerful and wealthy. In a single year they sent out large armies all around ; and when they returned victorious, they raised a brazen pillar in token of their gratitude to their gods. They had yet enough of chariots and soldiers and wealth ready for further aggressions. But alas ! it is both horrible and angering to think that the earth has come to no good for all these long ages of foolish human ambition and sinful warfare. The human heart is inclined to ignore fully the meaningless triumphs and glories that are now gone for ever. Love is the best thing in the world to have—it is for ever. (St. 7)



### Critical Appreciation of "Love Among the Ruins."

The poem is one of the most exquisite love-lyrics of Browning. It is not made complex and metaphysical by the admixture of high spiritual or philosophic thoughts nor made a sermon by close-reasoned argumentation like so many others of his love poems. More than half the poem is occupied with a series of glaring contrasts between the imagined past glories and triumphs of a powerful city once in existence there and the desolate, solitary charm of the bare landscape at the present time. The highly imaginative nature painting that the poem presents against the background of an imagined artificial grandeur of human civilization is by itself commendation enough to rank the poem among one of the very best in English literature. It is a noble re-creation of the past ; it is as noble a picture of nature's green magnificence obliterating the past. As regards the central theme of the poem, namely, true love is better than all human grandeur and all human efforts after glory because love is a thing that lasts for ever, while other things decay and disappear, it is brought home by the contrast between the single-minded devotion of the lovers to each other in contrast with "those departed vanities." The thought of the poem bears a close resemblance to the sparkling idea of Thomas Hardy who in the simplest language records his faith that love persists through the ages, inspite of the turmoil of "the breaking of the nations" and is as eternal, indestructible a fact as the very law of existence. "*In Love among the Ruins*, one of his sweetest masterpieces, the sight of old relics and visions of the dead fighters and charioteers do not.....lay a cold hand upon the lover ; but they make his happiness seem the compensation or 'Earth's returns' for those splendid vanities." Besides this thought element, Browning proves here a powerful metrical artist. The cadence is faultlessly harmonious and the rhymes are cleverly managed. The poem affords "Browning's acrobatic skill in queer rhyming" which is here the secret of his great success, though in many other poems it led him into worst grotesqueness.

### 17. BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

#### Critical Remarks and Argument of the Poem

"Bishop Blougram's Apology" is a defence of religious conformity in those cases in which the doctrines to which we conform exceed our powers of belief, but are not throughout opposed to



them ; its point of view being that of a Roman Catholic Churchman, who has secured his preferment by this kind of compromise. It is addressed to a semi-free thinker, who is supposed to have declared that a man who could thus identify himself with Romish superstitions must be despised as either knave or fool ; and Bishop Blougram has undertaken to prove that he is not to be thus despised ; least of all by the person before him.

The argument is therefore special pleading in the full sense of the word ; and it is clear from a kind of editor's note with which the poem concludes, we are meant to take it as such. But it is supposed to lie in the nature of the man who utters, as also in the circumstances in which it is uttered : for Bishop Blougram was suggested by Cardinal Wiseman ; and the literary hack, Gigadibs, is the kind of critic by whom a Cardinal Wiseman is most likely to be assailed :

And meanwhile, we have to control a mass of ignorant persons whose obedience is linked to the farthest end of the chain (to the first superstition which I am called upon to top off.) We have here again a question of making the best of our cabin-fittings, the best of the opportunities which life places to our hand. In conclusion, he draws a contemptuous picture of the obscure and inconsequent existence which Gigadibs accepts, as the apostle without genius and without enthusiasm, of what is, if it be one all, a *non-working* truth.

Gigadibs is silenced, and, as it proves, impressed ; but the Bishop is too clever to be very proud of his victory ; for he knows it has been a personal, much more than a real one. His strength has lain chiefly in the assumption (which only the entire monologue can justify or even convey) that his opponent would change places with him if he could ; and he knows that in arguing from this point of view he has been only half sincere. His reasonings have been good enough for the occasion. That is the best he can say for them.

## 18. PICTOR IGNOTUS

### Critical Remarks on the Poem

The subject is not historical, but is conceived in the true spirit which animated the work of the great religious (chiefly monastic) painters of the middle ages. The speaker says he could have painted pictures like those of a certain youth whose praise



is in every one's mouth. He could have executed all his soul conceived : hand and brain were pair, and all he saw he could have committed to his canvas. Each passion written on the countenance, whether Hope a-tiptoe for embrace, or Rapture with dropping eyes, or confidence lighting up the forehead, all that human faces gave him, has he saved. He has dreamed of going forth in his pictures to Pope or Kaiser, to the whole world, with flowers cast upon the ear which bore the freight, through streets re-named from the triumphal passing of his picture, to the house where learning and genius should greet his coming ; and the thought has frightened him, and he has shrunk from the popularity as a man shrinks from the gaze of rough soldiery ; it terrified him to think of his works dragged forth to be brought and sold as household stuff, to have to live with people sunk in their daily pettiness, to see their faces, listen to their prate and his work discussed. If at times he feels his work monotonous, as he goes on filling the cloisters and eternal aisles with the same Virgins, Babes and Saints, with the same cold, calm, beautiful regard, at least no merchant traffics in his heart.

The sacredness of the place where his pictures moulder and grow black will protect him from vain tongues which would criticise and discuss his work. This poem has been much misunderstood. Some have seen in it the bitter complaint and the wail of half-suppressed longing of one whom fame has passed unnoticed ; he has failed to please the world and will now retire to pursue his art in the cloister. Nothing could be further from the poet's purpose in this work.

Others, and those the majority of critics, have found in the poem a revelation of the true art-spirit, as though Mr. Browning had made a great discovery in this connection. The plain fact is that this spirit of retirement, this abhorrence of working for the praise of men, this hatred of applause seeking and of self-advertisement, was that which animated the men of old Catholic times who built our cathedrals and our abbey and who painted our great pictures and glorified all Europe with works of art. The poem might fairly be considered as uttered by a Fra Angelico with reference to Raffaele. The great monastic painters like Angelico painted under the eye of God looking upon their work as immediately inspired by His Spirit : for God and through God and not through men and for men was their work done. It has been the life work of Mr.



Ruskin to point this out. These men were not actuated by the vain advertising spirit which animates so much of our modern work of all kinds.

Humility is a virtue now little appreciated : it was the life of these old artists souls. Pictor Ignotus was not jealous of the popular youth whose pictures were decked with flowers by the people as they were borne through the streets which were re-named in their honour. He did not want the mob's applause ; he shrank from the appreciations of the thoughtless streetfolk as a nun would shrink from the compliments of a band of rough soldiery. All this beautiful spirit is fast dying out. When a writer like Browning reminds us that there were once, in "15—," in a place like Florence, men animated by it, critics cry out, "what a discovery ! How wonderful !" It is a discovery like ours of gold in South Africa, where the men of old time went to Ophir to find the precious metal.

### The Gist of the Poem.

"Pictor Ignotus" (Florence, 15—), is the answer of an unknown painter to the praise which he hears lavished on another man. He admits its justice, but declares that he too could have deserved it ; and his words have all the bitterness of a suppressed longing which an expected touch has set free. He, too, has dreamed of fame ; and felt no limits to his power of attaining it. But he saw, by some flash of intuition, that it must be bought by the dishonour of his works ; that, in order to bring him fame, they must descend in to the market, they must pass from hand to hand ; they must endure the shallowness of their purchasers' comments, share in pettiness of their lives. He has remained obscure, that his creations might be guarded against this sacrilege. "He paints Madonnas and saints in the twilight stillness of the cloister and the aisle, and if his heart saddens at the endless repetition of the one heavenward gaze, at least no merchant traffics in what he loves. There, where his pictures have been born, mouldering in the dampness of the wall, blackening in the smoke of the altar, amidst a silence broken only by prayer, they may 'gently' and 'surely' die. He asks himself, as he again subsides into mournful resignation, whether the applause of men may not be neutralized at its best by the ignoble circumstances which it entails.



## 19. THE YEAR'S AT THE SPRING

**Critical Remarks on the Poem.**

This song is from *Pippa Passes*. "Pippa Passes" represents the course of one day—Pippa's yearly holiday ; and is divided into what is virtually four acts, being the occurrences of "Morning," "Noon," "Evening" and "Night". Pippa rises with the sun, determined to make the best of the bright hours before her; and she spends them in wandering through the town, singing as she goes and all the while thinking of its happiest men and women, and fancying herself they. This happy ones are four, each the object of a different love, Ottima, whose aged husband is the owner of the mills, has a in Sebald. Phene, betrothed to the French sculptor Jules, will be led this morning to her husband's home. Luigi (a conspiring patriot) meets his mother at even in the turret. The Bishop, blessed by God, will sleep at Asolo to-night. Which love would she choose? The lover's? It gives cause for scandal. The husband's? It may not last. The parent's? it alone will guard us to the end of life. God's love? That is best of all. It is Monsignore she decides to be.

Ottima and her lover have murdered her husband at his villa on the hillside. She is the more reckless of the two, and she is striving by exercise of her attractions to silence Sebald's remorse. She has succeeded for the moment, when Pippa passes—singing. Something, in her song strikes his conscience like a thunderbolt, and its reviving force awakens Ottima's also. Both are spiritually saved.

Pippa's songs are not impressive in themselves. They are made so in every case by the condition of her hearer's mind ; and the idea of the story is obvious, besides being partly stated in the heroine's own words. No man is "great" or "small" in the sight of God—each life being in its own way the centre of creation. Nothing should be "great" or "small" in the sight of man ; since it depends on personal feelings or individual circumstances, whether a given will prove one or the other.

## 20. TRANSCENDENTALISM

**Critical Remarks on the Poem.**

*Transcendentalism : a Poem in Twelve Books.* (Men and Women, 1855.) This poem is probably intended by Mr Browning



as an answer to his critics. It has been said of Mr. Browning's poetry by a hundred competent writers that he does not sing, but philosophises instead ; that he gives the world his naked thoughts, his analysis of souls not draped in the beauty of the poet's art, but in the form of "stark-naked thought." There is no objection, says his interviewer, if he will but cast aside the harp which he does not play but only tunes and adjusts, and speak his prose to Europe through "the six foot Swiss tube which helps the hunter's voice from Alp to Alp." The fault is that he utters thoughts to men thinking they care little for form or melody, as boys do. It is quite otherwise he should interpret nature—which is full of mystery—to the soul of man : as Jacob Boehme heard the plants speak, and told men what they said ; or as John of Halberstadt, the magician, who by his will-power could create the flower Boehme thought about. The true poet is a poem himself, whatever be his utterance. Take back the harp again, and "pour heaven into this short home of life." Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) was a German mystical writer, who began life as a shoemaker and developed into a 'seer' of the higher order. He was a follower of the school of Paracelsus, and professed to know all mysteries by actually beholding them. He saw the origin of love and sorrow, heaven and hell. Nature lay unveiled to him ; he saw into the being of God, and into the heart of things. Mr. Browning refers to this in the line of the poem. "He noticed all at once that plants could speak." "William Law (1686-1761) was a follower of Boehme's system of philosophy. The Quakers have been much influenced by the Boehmenists. The old magicians thought they had discovered in the ashes of plants their primitive forms, which were again raised up by the force of heat. Nothing, they say, perishes in Nature ; all is but a continuation or a revival. The germina of resurrection are concealed in extinct bodies, as in the blood of men ; the ashes of roses will again revive into roses, though smaller and paler than if they had been planted.

The process of the *Palingenesis* — this picture of immortality — is described. These philosophers, having burnt a flower by calcination, disengaged the salts from its ashes, and deposited them in a glass phial ; a chemical mixture acted on it till in the fermentation the assumed a bluish and spectral hue. This dust thus excited by heat, shoots upwards into its primitive form ; by sympathy the parts unite, and while each is returning to its



destined place we see distinctly the stalk, the leaves, and the flower arise ; it is the pale spectre of a flower coming slowly forth from its ashes" (*Disraeli's Curiosities of Literature*, art. "Dreams at the Dawn of Philosophy".) John of Halberstadt was the magician who made the flowers on some such principles as is fabled above. He was an ecclesiastic, and had probably some knowledge of alchemy, often considered in those days as more or less a diabolical kind of learning. Transcendentalism is thus described by Webster : Transcendental, Empirical.—These terms, with the corresponding nouns *transcendentalism* and *empiricism* are of comparatively recent origin.

*Empirical* refers to knowledge which is gained by the experience of actual phenomena, without reference to the principles or laws to which they are to be referred, or by which they are to be explained. *Transcendental* has reference to those beliefs or principles which are not derived from experience, yet are absolutely necessary to make experience possible or useful. Such in the better sense of the term, is the transcendental philosophy, or transcendentalism. The term has been applied to a kind of investigation or a use of language which is vague, obscure, fantastic, or extravagant." The reference in the title of the poem is purely imaginary : there is no such work.

### The Gist of the Poem.

"Transcendentalism" is addressed to a young poet, who is accused of presenting his ideas 'naked', instead of draping them, in poetic fashion, in sights and sounds : in other words, of talking across his harp instead of singing to it. He acts on the supposition that, if the young want imagery, older men want rational thoughts. And his critic is declaring this a mistake. "Youth, indeed, would be wasted in studying the transcendental Jacob Boehme for the deeper meaning of things which life gives it to see and feel ; but when youth is past, we need all the more to be made to see and feel. It is not a thinker like Boehme who will compensate us for the lost summer of our life ; but a magician like John of Halberstadt, who can, at any moment, conjure roses up. There is a strong vein of humour in argument, which gives the impression of being consciously overstated. It is nevertheless a genuine piece of criticism.



## 21. HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

## Critical Remarks on the Poem.

*How it strikes a Contemporary.* (Men and Women ; 1855.) The faculty of observation is essential both to the poet and the spy. Lavater said that "he alone is an acute observer who can observe minutely without being observed." The poet of Valladolid was mistaken by the vulgar mob for an agent of the Government, because they were always catching him taking "such cognisance of men and things." His picture is sketched in a very few lines ; but these are sufficient to show us the very man, in his scrutinising hat crossing the Plaza Mayor of the dull and deserted city, in which there was—one would think—as little life to interest a poet as to employ a spy. We soon get to feel that the poet-evidences in the man's behaviour should have been sufficiently strong to save him from the reproaches of his neighbours. The dog at his heels, the note he took of any cruelty towards animals or simple trades, the poring over book-stalls, reveal to us the image of his soul.

However, his fellow-citizens in all these things thought they had evidence of a chief inquisitor ; and in the land of Spain, which for many centuries cowered under the shadow of the most terrible weapon ever forged against the liberties of man, inquisition and espionage were in the air. Men were better judges of spies than of poets ; they were more familiar with them. So it was set down in their minds that all their doings were sent by this recording prowler to king. All the mysteries of the town were traced to his influence : A's surprising fate, B's disappearing, C's mistress, all were traced to this "man about the streets." But it was not true, says the contemporary, that if you tracked the inquisitor home you would find him revelling in luxury. On the contrary, his habits were simple and abstemious ; at ten he went to bed, after a modest repast and a quiet game of cribbage with his maid. And when the poor, mysterious man came to die in the clean garret, whose sides were lined by an invisible guard who came to relieve him, there was no more need for that old coat which had seen so much service. How suddenly the angels change the fashion of our dress—and how much better they understand us than do our neighbours !



### The Gist of the Poem.

"*How it strikes a Contemporary*" describes a poet whose personality was not ignored, but mistaken; and the irony of circumstances displayed both in the extent of this mistake, and the colour which circumstance has given to it. This poet is a mysterious personage, who constantly wanders through the city, seeing every thing without appearing to use his eyes. His clothing, though old and worn has been of the fashion of the Court. He writes long letters, which are obviously addressed to "our Lord the King," and "which no doubt, have had to do with the disappearance of A, and the fate of B." He can be, people think, no other than a spy. A spy, we must admit, might proceed in much the same manner. Mr. Browning does, however, full justice to the excesses of popular imagination, once directed into a given channel, in the parallel touches which depict the portentous luxury in which the spy is supposed to live: the poor though decent garret in which the poet dies.

## 22. AN EPISTLE OF KARSHISH

### Critical Remarks on the Poem.

*Epistle, An, Containing the strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician.* (Men and Women, Vol. i., 1855) [The subject of the poem is the raising of Lazarus from the dead] Karshish a wandering school-physician, writing to the sage Abib, from which he has learned his art, gives him an account of certain matters of medical interest which he has discovered in the course of his travels, and which, like a good student, he communicates to his venerable teacher. After informing him that he has sent him some samples of rare pharmaceutical substances, he says that his journeyings brought him to Jericho, on the dangerous road from which city to Jerusalem he had met with sundry misadventures, and noted several cases of clinical interest, all of which he reports in the matter-of-fact way which betokens the scientific practitioner of the period. Amongst his plague, ague, apileptic, scalp-disease, and leprosy cures, he particularly describes "a case of mania subinduced by the epilepsy," which especially interested him. The disorder seemed to him of quite easy diagnosis: "'Tis but a case of mania, 'complicated by trance and epilepsy, but well within his powers as a physician to account for, except in the after circumstances of cure. 'Some spell, exorcisation or trick of art' had evidently



been employed by a Nazarene physician of his tribe, who bade him, when he seemed dead, "Rise !" and he did rise. He was "one Lazarus, jew—of good habit of body, and indeed quite beyond a ordinary men in point of health ; and his three days' sleep had so brightened his body and soul that it would be a great thing if the medical art could always ensure such result from use of any drug. He has undergone such change of mental vision that he eyes the world now like 'child, and puts all his old joys in the dust. He has lost his sense of the proportion of things : a great armament or a mule load of gourds are all the same to him, while some trifle will appear of infinite import ; yet he is stupefied because his fellow-men do not view things with his opened eyes. He is so perplexed with impulses that his heart and brain seem occupied with another world while his feet stay here. He desires only perfectly to please God ; he is entirely apathetic when told that Rome is on the march to destroy his town and tribe, yet he loves all things old and young, strong and weak, the flowers and birds, and is harmless as a lamb ; only at ignorance and sin he is impatient, but promptly cures himself. The physician would have sought the Nazarene who worked the cure, and would have held a consultation with him on the case, but discovered that he perished in a tumult many years ago, accused of wizardry, rebellion, and of holding a prodigious creed. Lazarus—it is well, says the physician, to keep nothing back in writing to a brother in the craft—regards the curer as God the Creator and sustainer of the world, that dwelt in flesh amongst us for a while ; but why write of trivial matters? He has more important things to tell.

"I noticed on the margin of a pool,  
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort  
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange !"

He begs the sage's pardon for troubling him with this man's tedious case, but it has touched him with awe, it maybe partly effect of his weakness. But he cannot close his letter without returning to the tremendous suggestion once more

"Think, Abib ! The very God !" —  
"So the All-great, were the All-loving too,—  
It is strange."

Professor Corson says this "is one of Browning's most remarkable psychological studies. It may be said to polarise the idea,



so often presented in his poetry, that doubt is a condition of the vitality of faith. It is a subtle representation of a soul conceived with absolute spiritual standards while obliged to live in a world where all standards are relative and determined by the circumstances and limitations of its situation." Lazarus has seen things as they are. "This show of things," so far as he is concerned, is done with. He now leads the *actual* life; his wonder and his sorrow are drawn from the reflection that his fellow-men remain in the region of phantasm. He lives really in the world to come. How infinitely little he found the things of time and sense in the of the eternal verities as grandly shown in the poem. The attitude of Lazarus under his altered conditions affords an answer to those who demand that an All Wise Being should not leave men to struggle in a region of phenomena but exhibit the actual to us in the present life. Under such conditions our probaleation would be impossible. As Browning shows in *La saisiaz*, a condition of certainty would destroy the school-time value of life; the highest truths are insusceptible of scientific demonstration. Lazarus is the hero of the poem, not Karshish. As the Bishop of Durham says in his paper 'On Browning's View of life, "Lazarus" is not a man, but a sign: he stands among men as a patient witness of the overwhelming reality of the divine—a witness whose authority is confessed, even against his inclination, by the student of nature, who turns again and again to the phenomena which he effects to disparage. In this crucial example Brownings shows how the exclusive dominance of spirit destroys the fulness of human life, its uses and powers, while it leaves a passive life, crowned, with an unearthly beauty." The professional attitude of Karshish is drawn with marvellous fidelity.

A paper in the *Lancet* on such a "case" would be precisely on the same lines to day, though the wandering off in to side details would not be quite so obvious, and there would be an entire absence of any trifling with the idea that "the All-Great were the All-Loving too." This is emotional," and modern science has nothing but contempt for that.

### The Gist of the Poem.

The Epistle of Karshish is addressed to a certain Abib, the writer's master in the science of medicine. It is written from Bethany; and "strange medical experience" of which it treats, is the *Case* of Lazarus whom Karshish has seen there. Lazarus, as



he relates, has been the subject of a prolonged epileptic trance, and his reason impaired by a too sudden awaking from it. He labours the fixed idea that he was raised from the dead : and that the Nazarene physician at whose command he rose (and who has since perished in a popular tumult) was no other than God : who for love's sake had taken human form, and worked and died for men. Karshish regards the madness of this idea as beyond rational doubt : but he is perplexed and haunted by its consistency : by the manner in which this supposed vision of the Heavenly life has transformed, even inverted the man's judgement of earthly things. He combats the impression as best he can ; recounts his scientific discoveries—the new plants, minerals, sickness, or cures to which his travels in Judea have introduced him ; half apologizes for his digression from these more important matters ; tries to excuse the hold which Lazarus has taken upon him by the circumstances in which they met ; and breaks out at last in this agitated appeal to Abib and the truth :—

“The very God ! think Abib ; dost thou think  
So, the All-great, were the All-loving too—  
The madman saith He said so : it is strange”.

(Vol. iv. p. 198)

The solitary sage alluded to is of course imaginary. Like the doubtful messenger to whom the letter will be entrusted, he helps to mark the incidental character with which Karshish strives to invest his “experience.”

### 23. FRA LIPPO LIPPI

#### Critical Remarks on the Poem.

*Fra Lippo Lippi.* (Men and Women, 1855 ; Rome, 1853-54.) [The Man.] Fra Filippo Lippi (1412-69), the painter, was the son of a butcher in Florence. His mother died while he was a baby, and his father two years later than his mother. His aunt, Moona Lapaecia, took him to her home, but in 1420, when the boy was but eight years old, placed him in the community of the Carmelites of the Carmine in Florence. He stayed at the monastery till 1432, and there became a painter. He seems to have ultimately received a more or less complete dispensation from his religious vows. In 1452 he was appointed chaplain to the convent of S. Giovannino in Florence, and in 1457 he was made



of S. Quirico at legnaia. At this time he made a large income ; but ever and again fell in to poverty, probably on account of the numerous love affairs in which he was constantly indulging. Lippi died at Spoleto on or about Oct. 8th, 1469. Vasari in his *Lives of the Painters*, tells the whole romantic story of his life. (The Poem) Brother Lippo the painter, working for the munificent House of the Medici, has been mewed up in the Palace, painting saints for Cosimo dei Medici. Unable longer to tolerate the restraint for he was a dissolute friar, with no vocation for the religious life), he has tried his sheets and counterpane together and let himself out of the window for a night's frolic with the girls whom he heard singing and skipping in the street below. He has been arrested by the watch man of the city, who noticed his monastic garb, and did not consider it in accord with his present occupation. He is making his defence and bribing them to let him go. He tells them his history : how he was a baby when his mother and father died, and he was left starving in the street, picking up fig skins and melon parings, refuse and rubbish as his only food. One day he was taken to the monastery, and while munching his first bread that month was induced to "renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world," and so became a monk at eight years old. They tried him with books and taught him some Latin ; as his hard life had given him abundant opportunity for reading people's faces, he found he could draw them in copy books, and so began to make pictures everywhere. The prior noticed this, and thought he detected genius, and would not hear of turning the boy out : he might become a great painter and "do our church up fine" he said. So the lad prospered ; he began to draw the monks—the fat—the lean, the black, the white, then the folks at church. But he was too realistic in his work : his faces, arms and legs were too true to nature, and the Prior shook his head—

‘And stopped all that in no time.’”

He told him his business was to paint men's souls and forget there was such a thing a flesh :

“Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arm !”

And so they made him rub all out. The painter asks if this was sense :

“A fine way to paint soul, by painting body  
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further  
And can't fare worse !”



He maintained that if we get beauty we get the best thing God invents. But he rubs out his paints what they like, clenching his teeth with rage . the while ; but sometimes, when a warm evening finds him painting saints, the revolt is complete, and he plays the fooleries they have caught him at. He knows he is a beast, but he can appreciate the beauty, the wonder and the power in the shapes of things which God has made to make us thankful them. They are not to be passed over and despised, but dwelt upon and wondered at, and painted too, for we must count it crime to let a truth slip. We are so made that we love passed then over unnoticed a hundred times before—

“And so they are better, painted,—better to us.  
Art was given for that.”

The world is no blot for us, nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good.” “Ah, but,” says the Prior, “your work does not make people pray !” But a skull and cross-bones are sufficient for that ; you don’t need art at all.”.....

And then the poor monk begs the guard not to report him : he will make amends for the offence done to the Church ; give him six months time, he will paint such a picture for convent ! It will please the nuns. “So six months hence. Good-bye ! No lights : I know my way back !”

### Gist of the Poem.

“Fra Lippo Lippi” is a lively monologue, supposed to be uttered by that friar himself, on the occasion of a night frolic in which he has been surprised. Cosmodei Medici had locked him up in one room of the palace till some pictures he was painting for him should be finished ; and on this particular night he has found the confinement intolerable. He has whipped his bed cloths into a rope, scrambled down from his window, and run after a girlish face which laughingly invited him from the street ; and was about to return from the equivocal neighbourhood in to which the fun had led him, when his monkish dress caught the attention of the guard, and he was captured and called to account. He proceeds to give a sketch of his life and opinions, which supplies a fair excuse for the escapade. The facts he relates are including this one, historical.

Fra Lippo Lippi had no vocation for the priesthood. He was enticed into a Carmelite convent when a half starved



o'phan of eight years old, ready to subscribe to any arrangement which promised him enough to eat. There he developed an extraordinary talent for drawing ; and the Prior, glad to turn it to account, gave him the cloisters and the church to paint. But the rising artist had received his earliest inspirations in the street. His first practice had been gained in scrawling faces in his copy books, and expanding the notes of his musical texts in to figures with arms and legs. His conceptions were not sufficiently spiritual to satisfy the Prior's ideal of Christian art. The men and women he painted true to life. The simpler brethren were as they recognised each familiar type. But the authorities looked grave at so much obtruding of the flesh ; and the Prior clearly laid down his theory that painting was meant to inspire religious thoughts, and not to stifle them ; and must therefore show no more of the human body than was needed to image forth the soul.

Fra Lippo Lippi comments freely quaintly on the absurdity of showing soul by means of bodies so ill painted that no one can bear to dwell upon them, as on the fallacy involved in all contempt for the earthly life. "He will never believe that the world, with all its life and beauty, is an unmeaning blank. He is sure, 'it means intensely and means good'. He is sure, too, that to reproduce what is beautiful in it is the mission of Art. If any one objects, that the world being Gods work, Art can not improve on it, and the painter will best leave it alone : he answers that somethings are the better for being painted ; because, as we are made, we love then best when we see them so. The artist has lent his mind for us to see with. That is what Art means ; what God with giving it to us."

Nevertheless (he continues) he rubbed out his men and women ; and though now, with a *medici* for his patron, he may paint as he likes, the old schooling sticks to him. And he works away at his saints, till something comes to remind him that life is not a dream, and he kicks the traces, as he has done now. He ends with a half-joking promise to make the church a gained through his misconduct (supposing that the secret has been kept from her), by a beautiful picture which he will paint by way of attonement.

This picture, which he describes very humorously, is that of the Coronation of the Virgin, now in the "Belle Art" at Florence.



## 24. CLEON

## Critical Remarks on the Poem

*Cleon.* (Men and Women, 1855). The speculation of this poem may be compared with a picture in a magic lantern slowly dissolving into another view, and losing itself in that which is succeeding it. We have the latest utterances of the beautiful Greek thought, saddened as they were by the despairing not of the sense of hopelessness which married the highest effort of man, and which was never so acutely felt as at the period when the sun of christianity was rising and about to fill the world with the spirit of Eternal Hope. The old heathenism is dissolving away, first faint outlines of the gospel glory are detected by the philosopher who has heard of the fame of Paul, and is not sure he is not the same as the Christ preached by some slaves whose doctrine "could be held by no same man". The quotation with which the poem is headed is from Acts of the Apostles. Chap. xviii. 28 :

"As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." The quotation is from the *Phenomena* of Aratus, a poet of Tarsus, in Cilicia, St. Paul's own city. There is also a very similar passage in a hymn of the stoic cleanthes : "Zeus, thou crown of creation, Hail !—we are thy offspring". The persons of the poem are not historical, though the thought expressed is highly characteristic of that of the Greek philosophers calmly discussed the truth or falsity of their dying religions, an easy tolerance arose, all religions were permitted because "indifference had eaten the heart out of them." Four hundred years before our era Eastern philosophy, through the Greek conquests in Asia, had begun to influence European thinkers by its strange and subtle attempts to solve the mystery of existence. A spirit of inquiry, and a restless craving for some undefined faith which should take the place of that which was everywhere dying out, prepared the way for the progress of the simple, love-compelling religion of Christ and made everyone's heart more or less suitable soil for the good seed. Cleon is a poet from the isles of Greece who has received a letter from his royal patron and many costly gifts, which crowd his court and portico. He writes to thank his king for his munificence, and in his reply says it is true that he has written that epic on the hundred plates of gold ; true that he composed the chant which the mariners will learn to sing



as they haul their nets ; true that the image of the sun-god on the light house is his also ; that the poetic—the portico at Athens painted with battle pictures by polygnotus the Thasian, has been adorned too, with his own works. He knows the plastic anatomy of man and woman and their proportion, not observed before ; he has moreover

“Written three books on the soul,  
Proving absurd all written hitherto,  
And putting us to ignore again.”

He has combined the modes for music and invented one—

“In brief all arts are mine.”

All this is known ; it is not so marvellous either, because men's minds in these letter days are greater than those of olden time because more composite. Life, he finds reason to believe, is intended to be viewed eventually as a great whole, not analysed to parts, but each having reference to all : the true judge of man's life must see the whole, not merely one way of it at once ; the artist who designed the chequered pavement did not superimpose the figures, putting the last design over the old and blotting it out,—he made a picture and used every stone, whatever its figure, in the composition of his work. So he conceives that perfect, separate forms which make the portions of mankind were created at first, afterwards these were combined, and so came progress. Mankind is a synthesis—a putting together of all the single men. Zeus had a plan in all, and our souls know this, and cry to him—

“To vindicate his purpose in our life.”

As for himself, he is not a poet like Homer, such a musician as Tarpander, nor a sculptor like Phidias ; point by point he fails to reach their height, but in sympathy he is the equal of them all. So much for the first part of the king's letter : it is all true which has been reported of him. Next he addresses himself to the questions asked by the king : has he not attained the very crown and proper end of life ?” and having so abundantly succeeded, does he fear death as do lower men ? Cleon replies that if this questioner could have been present on the earth before the advent of man, and seen all its tenantry, from worm to bird, he would have been then perfect. Had Zeus asked him if he should do more for Creatures than he had done, he would have replied, “yes, make each grow conscious in



himself" ; he chooses then for men, his last premeditated work, that a quality may arise within his soul which may view itself and so be happy. "Let him learn how he lives." Cleon would, however, tell the king it would have been better had man made no step beyond the better beast. Man is the only creature in whom there is failure ; it is called advance that man should climb to a height which over looks lower forms of creation simply that he may perish there. Our vast capabilities for joy, our craving souls, our struggles, only serve to show us that man is inadequate to joy, as the soul sees joy. Man can use but a man's joy while he sees God's" He agrees with the king in his profound discouragement : most progress is most failure. As to the next question which the letter asks : "Does he, the poet, artist, musician, fear death as common men ? will it not comfort him to know that his works will live, though he may perish ? "

Not at all, he poetests—he, sleeping in his urn while men sing songs and tell his praise ! "It is so horrible." And so he sometimes imagines Zeus may intend for us some future state where the capability for joy is as unlimited as is our present desire for joy. But no : "Zeus has not yet revealed it He would have done so were it possible !" Nothing can more faithfully portray the desolation of the soul "without God," the sense of loss in man, whose soul, emanating from the Divine, refuses to be satisfied with any thing short of God himself. Art, wealth, learning, honours, serve not to dissipate for a moment the infinite sadness of this soul "without God and without hope in the world." And, as he wrote, Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, had turned to the Pagan world with the Gospel which the Jews had rejected. To the very island in Grecian sea whence arose this sad wail of despair the echo of the angel-song of Bethlehem had been borne, "Peace on earth, good will towards men." Round the coasts of the Aegean sea, through Philippi, Troas, Mity—lene, Chios, and Miletus, "the mere barbarian jew Paulus" had sown the seeds of a faith which should grow up and shelter under its branches the weary truth-seekers who knew too well what was the utter hopelessness of "art for art's sake" for satisfying the infinite yearning of the human heart. In the crypt of the church of San Marziano at Syracuse is the primitive church of Sicily, constructed on the spot where St. Paul is said to have preached during his three



days' sojourn on the island. Here is shown the rude stone altar where St. Paul broke the bread of life ; and as we stand on this sacred spot and recall the past in this strange city of a hundred memorials of antiquity—the temples of the gods, the amphitheatre, the vast altar, the Greek theatre, the walls of Epipolae, the aqueducts, the forts, the harbour, the quarries, the Ear of Dionysus, the tombs, the streams and fountains famed in classic story and sung by poets—all fade into insignificance before the hallowed spot whence issued the fertilising influences of the Gospel preached by this same Paulus to a few poor slaves. The time would come, and not so far distant either, when the doctrines of Christ and Paul would be rejected "by no man"

"Cleon" is a protest against the inadequacy of the earthly life ; and the writer is supposed to be one of those Greek poets or thinkers to whom St. Paul alludes, in a time quoted from Aratus in the Acts, and which stands at the heart of the Poem. Cleon believes in Zens under the attributes of the one God. but he sees nothing in his belief to warrant the hope of immortality ; and his love of life is intense and so untiring that fact is very grievous to him.

He is stating his case to an imaginary king—Protus—his patron and friend ; whose convictions are much the same as his own, but who thinks him in some degree removed from the common lot : since his achievements in philosophy and in art must procure him not only a more perfect existence, but in one sense a more lasting one. Cleon protests against this idea.

"He has," he admits, "done all which the king imputes to him. If he has not been a Homer, a Pheidias, or a Terpander, his creative sympathies have united all three ; and in thus passing from the simple to the complex, he has obeyed the law of progress, though at the risk perhaps of appearing a smaller man."

"But his life has not been the more perfect on that account. Perfection exists only in those more mechanical grades of being in which joy is unconscious, but also self sufficing. To grow in consciousness is to grow in the capability and in the desire for joy ; to decline rather than advance, in the physical power of attaining it. Man's soul expands his 'physical reciprocity' remains for ever bounded."



“Nor are his works a source of life to him either now or for the future. The conception of youth and strength and wisdom is not its reality : the knowing (and depicting) what joy is, is not the possession of it. And the surviving of his work, when he himself is dead, is but a mockery the more.”

It is all so horrible that he sometimes imagines another life, as unlimited in capability, as this in the desire, for joy, and dreams that Zeus has revealed it. “But he has not revealed it, and therefore it will not be.” St Paul is preaching at this very time, and Protus sends a letter to be forwarded to him ; but Cleon does not admit that knowledge can reside in a “barbarian Jew” ; and gently rebukes his royal for inclining to such doctrine, which, as he has gathered from one who heard it, “can be held by no same man.”

Cleon constantly uses the word soul as antithesis to body : but he uses it in its ancient rather than its modern sense as expressing the sentient life, not the spiritual ; and this pethaps explains the anomaly of his believing that it is independent of the hower physical powers, and yet not destined to survive them.



## SELECTED POEMS







# 1. 'CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME'

*(See Edgar's song in 'LEAR')*

## I

My first thought was, he lied in every word,  
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye  
Askance to watch the working of his lie  
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford  
Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored  
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby. 6

## II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?  
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare  
All travellers who might find him posted there,  
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh  
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph  
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare, 12

## III

If at his counsel I should turn aside  
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,  
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly  
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride  
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,  
So much as gladness that some end might be. 18

## IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,  
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my  
hope  
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope  
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,  
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring  
My heart made, finding failure in its scope. 24



## V

As when a sick man very near to death  
 Seems dead indeed, and feels being and end  
 The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,  
 And hears one bid the other go, draw breath  
 Freelier outside, ('since all is o'er,' he saith 29  
 'And the blow fallen no grieving can amend.,')

## VI

While some discuss if near the other graves  
 Be room enough for this, and when a day  
 Suits best for carrying the corpse away  
 With care about the banners, scarves and staves:  
 And still the man hears all, and only craves 35  
 He may not shame such tender love and stay.

## VII

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,  
 Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ  
 So many times among 'The Band'—to wit,  
 The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed  
 Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,  
 And all the doubt was now—should I be fit ? 42

## VIII

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,  
 That hateful cripple, out of his highway  
 Into the path he pointed. All the day  
 Had been a dreary one at best, and dim  
 Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim  
 Red leer to see the plain catch its estray. 48

## IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found  
 Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,  
 Than, pausing to throw backward a last view  
 O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:  
 Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.  
 I might go on; nought else remained to do. 54



X

So, on I went. I think I never saw  
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:  
For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!  
But cockle, spurge, according to their law  
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,  
You'd think; a burr had been a treasuretrove. 60

XI

No! penury, inertness and grimace,  
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. 'See  
'Or shut your eyes,' said Nature peevishly,  
'It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:  
'Tis the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place  
'Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free.' 66

XII

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk  
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents  
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents  
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk  
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk  
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents. 72

XIII

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair  
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud  
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.  
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,  
Stood stupefied, however he came there;  
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud! 78

XIV

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,  
With that red gaunt and colloped neak a-strain,  
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;  
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;  
I never saw a brute I hated so;  
He must be wicked to deserve such pain. 84



## XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.  
 As a man calls for wine before he fights,  
 I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,  
 Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.  
 Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art:  
 One taste of the old time sets all to rights. 90

## XVI

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face  
 Beneath its garniture of curly gold,  
 Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold  
 An arm in mine to fix me to the place,  
 That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!  
 Out went my heart's new fire and left is cold. 96

## XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands  
 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.  
 What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.  
 Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman  
 hands  
 Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands  
 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst! 102

## XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;  
 Back therefore to my darkening path again!  
 No sound, no sight as for as eye could strain.  
 Will the night send a howlet or a bat?  
 I asked: when something on the dismal flat 107  
 Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

## XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path  
 As unexpected as a serpent comes.  
 No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;  
 This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath  
 For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath 113  
 Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.



XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,  
 Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;  
 Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit  
 Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:  
 The river which had done them all the wrong,  
 Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit. 120

XXI

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared  
 To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,  
 Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek  
 For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!  
 —It may have been a water-rat I speared,  
 But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek. 126

XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.  
 Now for a better country. Vain presage!  
 Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,  
 Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank  
 Soil to a splash? Toads in a poisoned tank,  
 Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage— 132

XXIII

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.  
 What penned them there, with all the plain to  
 choose?  
 No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,  
 None out of it. Mad brewage set to work  
 Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk  
 Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews. 138

XXIV

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!  
 What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,  
 Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel  
 Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air  
 Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,  
 Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel. 144



## XXV

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,  
 Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth  
 Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,  
 Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood  
 Changes and off he goes!) within a rood— 149  
 Dog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

## XXVI

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,  
 Now patches where some leanness of the soil's  
 Broke into moss or substances like boils;  
 Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him  
 Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim  
 Goping at death, and dies while it recoils. 156

## XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end!  
 Nought in the distance but the evening, nought  
 To point my footstep further! At the thought,  
 A great black brid, Apollyon's bosom friend,  
 Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned  
 That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sou- 162  
 ght.

## XXVIII

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,  
 'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place  
 All round to mountains—with such name to grace  
 Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.  
 How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!  
 How to get from them was no clearer case. 168

## XXIX

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick  
 Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—  
 In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,  
 Progress this way. When, in the very nick  
 Of giving up, one time more, came a click  
 As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den! 174



## XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once,  
This was the place! those two hills on the right,  
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in  
fight ;  
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain ..Dunce,  
Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,  
After a life spent training for the sight! 180

## XXXI

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?  
The round squat turret, blind as the fool' heart,  
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart  
In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf  
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf  
He strikes on, only when the timbers start. 186

## XXXII

Not see ? because of night perhaps? — why, day  
Came back again for that! before it left,  
The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:  
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,  
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay — 191  
'Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!'

## XXXIII

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled  
Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears  
Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—  
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,  
And such was fortunate, yet each of old 197  
Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

## XXXIV

There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met  
To view the last of me, a living frame  
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame  
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet  
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, 203  
And blew. '*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*



## 2 CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS; OR NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND.

'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.'

[ 'Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,  
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,  
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin  
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,  
And feels about his spine small est-things course,  
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:  
And while above his head a pompion-plant,  
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,  
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,  
And now a flower drops with a bee inside, 10  
And now a fruit to sand at, catch and crunch,—  
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross  
And recross till they weave a spider-web  
(Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)  
And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,  
Touching that other, whom his dam called God.  
Because to talk about Him, vexes—ha,  
Could He but know! and time to vex is now,  
When talk is safer than in winter time.  
Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep 20  
In confidence he drudges at their task,  
And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,  
Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech,]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!

'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.  
'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,  
But not the stars; the stars come otherwise;  
Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:  
Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,  
And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same. 30

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:  
He hated that He cannot change His cold,  
Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish  
That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,  
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine  
O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid  
A crystal spike 'twixt warm walls of wave;



Only, she ever sickened, found repulse  
At the other kind of water, not her life,  
(Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun 40  
Flounced back from bilss she was not born to breathe,  
And in her old bounds burid her despair,  
Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,  
Trees and the fowls here, beast ands creeping thing.

Yon otter, sleek-wet black, lithe as a leech;

Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,

That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown

*wild animal*

He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedged  
eye

By moonlight; and the pie with the long tongue 50  
That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,

And says a plain word when she finds her prize,

But will not eat the ants; the ants themselves

That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks

About their nole—He made all these and more,

Made all we see, and us, in spite: how else?

He could not, Himself, make a second self

To be His mate; as well have made Himself:

He would not make what he dislikes or slights,

An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains: 60

But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,

Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be—

Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,

Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,

Things He admires and mocks too,—that is it.

Because, so brave, so better though they be,

It nothing skills if He begin to plague.

Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,

Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,

Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,— 70

Then, when froth rises bladdery; drink up all,

Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain;

Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,

And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.

Put case, unable to be what I wish,

I yet could make a live bird out of clay:

Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban

Able to fly?—for, there, see, he hath wings,



And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,  
 And there, a stieg to do his foes offence,  
 There, and I will that he begin to live,  
 Fly to you rock-top, nip me off the horns  
 Of grigs high up that make the merry din,  
 Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.  
 In which feat. if his leg snapped, brittle clay.  
 And he lay stupid-like,—why, I should laugh;

80

And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,  
 Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,  
 Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,—  
 Well, as the chance were, this might take or else 90  
 Not take my fancy: I might hear his cry,  
 And give the manikin three sound legs for one,  
 Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,  
 And lessoned he was mine and merely clay,  
 Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme,  
 Drinking the mash, with brain become alive.  
 Making and marring clay at will? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him.  
 Nor kind, nor cruel: He is strong and Lord.

'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs 100

That march now from the mountain to the sea;

'Let twenty pass, and stone the twentyfirst,  
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.

'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots  
 Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off;

'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,  
 And two worms he whose nippers end in red;  
 As it likes me each time, I do: so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main  
 Placable if His mind and ways were guessed, 110

But rougher than His handiwork, be sure!

Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,

And envieth that, so helped, such things do more  
 Than He who made them! What consoles but this?

That they, unless through Him, do nought at all,

And must submit: what other use in things?

'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder-joint

That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay

When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue:

Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay 120



Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt:  
 Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth  
 'I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,  
 'I make the cry my maker cannot make  
 'With his great round mouth; he must blow through  
 mine!'

Would not I smash it with my foot? so He.  
 But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease?  
 Aha, that is a question! Ask, for that,  
 What knows,—the something over Setebos 129  
 That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,  
 Worsted drove off and did to nothing, perchance.  
 There may be something quiet o'er His head.  
 Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,  
 Since both derive from weakness in some way.

I joy because the quails come; would not joy  
 Could I bring quails here when I have a mind:  
 This Quiet, all it hath a mind to; doth.  
 'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,  
 But never spends much thought nor care that way.  
 It may look up, work up,—the worse for those 140  
 It works on! 'Careth but for Setebos  
 The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,

Who, making Himself feared through what He does;  
 Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar  
 To what is quiet and hath happy life;  
 Next looks down here, and out of very spite  
 Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real  
 These good things to match those as hips do grapes,  
 'Tis solace making baubles, ay, and sport.  
 Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books 150  
 Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle:

Vexed, 'stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,  
 Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words;  
 Has peeled a wand and called it by a name;  
 Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe  
 The eyed skin of a supple oncelot;  
 And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,  
 A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,  
 Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,  
 And saith she is Miranda and my wife: 160



'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane  
 He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge:  
 Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,  
 Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,  
 And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge  
 In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;  
 A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.

'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,

Taketh his mirth with make-believes: so He.

His dam held that the Quiet made all things 170  
 Which Setebos vexed ~~only~~: holds not so:

Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.

Had He meant other, while His Hand was in,

Why not make horny eyes on thorn could prick,

Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,

Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,

Like an orc's armour? Ay,—so spoil His sports

He is the One now: only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.

Ay, himself loves what does him good; but why? 180

'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast

Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,

But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate

Or love, just as it liked him: He hath eyes.

Also it pleaseth Setebos to work,

Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,

By no means for the love of what is worked.

'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world

When all goes right, in this safe summertime,

And he wants little, hungers, aches not much, 190

Than trying what to do with wit and strength.

'Falls to make something: 'piled yon pile of turfs,

And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk

And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,

And sit up endwise certain spikes of tree,

And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,

Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill

No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake;

'Shall some day knock it down again: so He.

'Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof! 200

One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.

He hath a spite against me, that I knows



Just as He favours ~~Prosper, who knows why?~~

So it is, all the same, as well I find.

'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm  
With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises  
Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,  
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,  
Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,  
And licked the whole labour flat : so much for spite.

'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies) 211  
Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade:

Often they scatter sparkles: there is force!  
'Dug up newt He may have euvied once  
And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone.  
Please Him and hinder this?—What Prosper does ?  
Aha, if He would tell me how! Not He!

There is the sport: discover how or die!  
All need not die, for of the things o' the isle  
Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees; 220

Those at His mercy,—why, they please Him most  
When.. when...well, never try the same way twice!  
Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.  
You must not know His ways, and play Him off,  
Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself:

'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears  
But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,  
And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence:

'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,  
Curls up into a ball, pretending death 230

For fright at my approach : the two ways please.  
But what would move my choler more than this,  
That either creature counted on its life  
To-morrow and next day and all days to come  
Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart,

'Because he did so yesterday with me,  
'And otherwise with such another brute,  
'So must he do henceforth and always.'—Ay ?  
Would teach the reasoning couple what 'must' means !

'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord ? So He. 240

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,  
And we shall have to live in fear of Him  
So long as He lives, keeps His strength : no change,  
If He have done His best, make no new world



To please Him more, so leave off watching this,—  
 If He surprise not even the Quiet's self  
 Some strange day,—or, suppose, grow into it.  
 As grubs grow butterflies : else, here are we,  
 And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop. 250

His dam held different, that after death  
 He both plagued enemies and feasted friends :  
 Idly ! He doth His worst in this our life,  
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,  
 Saving last pain for worst,—with which, an end.

Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire  
 Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself, —

Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,  
 Bask on the pompion-bell above : kills both.

'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball 260  
 On head and tail as if to save their lives :  
 Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.

Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose  
 This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,  
 And always, above all else, envies Him ;  
 Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,  
 Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh.

And never speaks his mind save housed as now :  
 Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here,  
 O'erheard this speech, and asked 'What chucklest at ?'  
 'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off, 271

Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,  
 Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,

Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste :

While myself lit a fire, and made a song

And sung it, '*What I hate, be consecrate*

*'To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate*

*'For thee ; what see for envy in poor me ?'* 278

Hoping, the while, since evils sometimes mend,

Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime,

That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch

And conquer Setebos, or likelier He

Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die. 283



[What, what ? A curtain o'er the world at once !  
 Crickets stop hissing ; not a bird—or, yes,  
 There scuds His raven that has told Him all !  
 It was fool's play, this prattling ! Ha ! The wind  
 Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,  
 And fast invading fires begin ! White blaze—  
 A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there, there,  
 there, 290

His thunder follows ! Fool to gibe at Him !  
 Lo ! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos !  
 'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,  
 Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month  
 One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape !] 295

### 3. MEETING AT NIGHT

#### I

The grey sea and the long black land ;  
 And the yellow half-moon large and low ;  
 And the startled little waves that leap  
 In fiery ringlets from their sleep,  
 As I gain the cove with pushing prow,  
 And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

#### II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach ;  
 Three fields to cross till a farm appears ;  
 A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
 And blue spurt of a lighted match,  
 And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,  
 Than the two hearts beating each to each !

### 4. PARTING AT MORNING

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,  
 And the sun looked over the mountain's rim :  
 And straight was a path of him,  
 And the need of a world of men for me.

### SONG

#### I

Nay but you, who do not love her,  
 Is she not pure gold, my mistress ?  
 Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her ?



Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,  
And this last fairest tress of all,  
So fair, see, ere I let it fall ?

## II

Because, you spend your lives in praising ;  
To praise, you search the wide world over :  
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,  
If earth holds aught—speak truth,—above her?  
Above this tress, and this, I touch  
But cannot praise, I love so much !

## 5. A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

## I

Let's contend no more, Love,  
Strive nor weep :  
All be as before, Love,  
—Only sleep!

## II

What so wild as words are?  
I and thou  
In debate, as birds are,  
Hawk on bough !

## III

See the creature stalking  
While we speak!  
Hush and hide the talking,  
Cheek on cheek !

## IV

What so false as truth is,  
False to thee ?  
Where the serpent's tooth is  
Shun the tree—

## V

Where the apple reddens  
Never pry —  
Lest we lose our Edens,  
Eve and I.



## VI

Be a god and hold me  
 With a charm !  
 Be a man and fold me  
 With thine arm !

## VII

Teach me, only teach, Love !  
 As I ought  
 I will speak thy speech, Love  
 Think thy thought —

## VIII

Meet, if thou require it  
 Both demands,  
 Laying flesh and spirit  
 In thy hands,

## IX

That shall be to-morrow  
 Not to-night :  
 I must bury sorrow  
 Out of sight :

## X

—Must a little weep, Love,  
 (Foolish me !)  
 And so fall asleep, Love;  
 Loved by thee.

## 6. MISCONCEPTIONS

## I

This is a spray the Bird clung to,  
 Making it blossom with pleasure,  
 Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,  
 Fit for her nest and her treasure,  
 Oh, what a hope beyond measure  
 Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to,—  
 So to be singled out, built in, and sung to !

7

## II

This is a heart the Queen leant on,  
 Thrilled in a minute erratic,



Ere the true bosom she bent on,  
 Meet for love's regal dalmatic.  
 Oh, what a fancy ecstatic  
 Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went on—  
 Love 'o be saved for it, proffered to, spent on ! 14

## 7. LAMENT FOR VANISHED BEAUTY

### I

Heap cassia, sandal-buds and stripes  
 Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,  
 Smeared with dull nard an Indian wipes  
 From out her hair : such balsam falls  
 Down sea-side mountain pedestals,  
 From tree-tops where tired winds are fain,  
 Spent with the vast and howling main,  
 To treasure half their island-gain. 8

### II

And strew faint sweetness from some old  
 Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud  
 Which breaks to dust when once unrolled ;  
 Or shredded perfume, like a cloud  
 From closet long to quiet vowed,  
 With moth'd and dropping arras hung,  
 Mouldering her lute and books among,  
 As when a queen, long dead, was young. 16

## 8. 'DE GUSTIBUS—

### I

Your ghost will walk, you lover of trees,  
 (If our loves remain)  
 In an English lane,  
 By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.  
 Hark, those two in the hazel coppice—  
 A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,  
 Making love, say,—  
 The happier they !  
 Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,  
 And let them pass, as they will too soon 10



With the bean-flower's boon,  
And the blackbird's tune,  
And May, and June !

## II

What I love best in all the world  
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,  
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.  
Or look for me, old fellow of mine,  
(If I get my head from out the mouth  
O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,  
And come again to the land of lands)—  
In a sea-side house to the farther South,  
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,  
And one sharp tree—'tis a cypress—stands,  
By the many hundred years red-rusted,  
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted,  
My sentinel to guard the sands  
To the water's edge. For, what expands  
Before the house, but the great opaque  
Blue-breadth of sea without a break ?  
While, in the house, for ever crumbles  
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,  
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.  
A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles  
Down on the pavement, green-fleshmelons,  
And says there's news to-day—the king  
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,  
Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling :  
—She hopes they have not caught the felons.  
Italy, my Italy !  
Queen Mary's saying serves for me —  
    (When fortune's malice  
    Lost her—Calais)—  
Open my heart and you will see  
Graved inside of it, 'Italy.'  
Such lovers old are I and she :  
So it always was, so shall ever be !

20

30

40

46



## 9. THE FLOWER'S NAME

## I

Here's the garden she walked across,  
 Arm in my arm, such a short while since :  
 Hark, now I push its wicket, the moss  
 Hinders the hinges and makes them wince !  
 She must have reached this shrub ere she turned,  
 As back with that murmur the wicket swung ;  
 For she laid the poor snail, my chance foot spurned,  
 To feed and forget it the leaves among. 8

## II

Down this side of the gravel-walk  
 She went while her robe's edge brushed the box :  
 And here she paused in her gracious talk  
 To point me a moth on the milk-white phlox.  
 Roses, ranged in valiant row,  
 I will never think that she passed you by !  
 She loves you noble roses, I know ;  
 But yonder, see, where the rock-plants lie ! 16

## III

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,  
 Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim ;  
 Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,  
 Its soft meandering Spanish name :  
 What a name! Was it love or praise ?  
 Speech half-asleep or song half-awake ?  
 I must learn Spanish, one of these days,  
 Only for that slow sweet name's sake. 24

## IV

Roses, if I live and do well,  
 I may bring her, one of these days,  
 To fix you fast with as fine a spell,  
 Fit you each with his Spanish phrase ;  
 But do not detain me now ; for she lingers  
 There, like sunshine over the ground,  
 And ever I see her soft white fingers  
 Searching after the bud she found. 32



V

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,  
 Stay as you are and be loved for ever !  
 Bud, if I kiss you 'tis that you blow not :  
 Mind, the shut pink month opens never !  
 For while it pouts, her fingers wrestle,  
 Twinkling the audacious between,  
 Till round they turn and down they nestle—  
 Is not the dear mark still to be seen ?

40

VI

Where I find her not, beauties vanish ;  
 Whither I follow her, beauties flee ;  
 Is there no method to tell her in Spanish  
 June's twice June since she breathed it with me ?  
 Come, bud, show me the least of her traces,  
 Treasure my lady's lightest footfall !  
 —Ah, you may flout and turn up your faces—  
 Roses, you are not so fair after all !

48

10. RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

I

I know a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives  
 First, when he visits, last, too, when he leaves  
 The world ; and, vainly favoured, it repays  
 The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze  
 By no change of its large calm front of snow.  
 And underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,  
 He cannot have perceived, that changes ever  
 At his approach ; and, in the lost endeavour  
 To live his life, has parted, one by one,  
 With all a flower's true graces, for the grace  
 Of being but a foolish mimic sun,  
 With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.  
 Men nobly call by many a name the Mount  
 As over many a land of theirs its large  
 Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe  
 Is reared, and still with old names, fresh names vie,  
 Each to its proper praise and own account :  
 Men call the Flower, the Sunflower, sportively.

10



## II

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look  
 Across the waters to this twilight nook,  
 —The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook ! 20

## III

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed ?  
 Go!—saying ever as thou dost proceed,  
 That I, French Rudel, choose for my device  
 A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice  
 Before its idol. See ! These inexpert  
 And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt  
 The woven picture ; 'tis a womans's skill  
 Indeed ; but nothing baffled me, so, ill  
 Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed 30  
 On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees  
 On my flower's breast as on a platform broad :  
 But, as the flower's concern is not for these  
 But solely for the sun, so men applaud  
 In vain this Rudel, he not looking here 35  
 But to the East—the East ! Go, say this, Pilgrim dear !

## 11. A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

## I

Oh Galuppi, Baldassarò, this is very sad to find !  
 I can hardly misconceive you ; it would prove me deaf  
 and blind ;  
 But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a  
 heavy mind !

## II

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the  
 good it brings.  
 What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merch-  
 ants were the kings,  
 Where Saint Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed  
 the sea with rings ?



## III

Ay, because the sea's the street there ; and 'tis arched  
 by...what you call  
 ...Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept  
 the carnival :  
 I was never out of England—it's as if I saw it all.

## IV

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was  
 warm in May ? 10  
 Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to  
 mid-day,  
 When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow,  
 do you say ?

## V

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so  
 red,—  
 On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower  
 on its bed,  
 O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man  
 might base his head ?

## VI

Well, and it was graceful of them—they'd break talk  
 off and afford  
 —She, to bite her mask's black velvet—he, to finger on  
 his sword,  
 While you sat and played Toccatas, stately as the  
 clavichord ?

## VII

What ? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminish-  
 ed, sigh on sigh,  
 Told them something ? Those suspensions, those  
 solutions—'Must we die ?' 20  
 Those commise rating sevenths—'Life might last ! we  
 can but try !'



## VIII

‘Were you happy?’—‘Yes.’—‘And are you still as  
happy?’—‘Yes. And you?’  
‘—Then, more kisses!’—‘Did I stop them, when a  
million seemed so few?’  
Hark, the dominant’s persistence till it must be answer-  
ed to!

## IX

So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised  
you, I dare say!  
‘Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave  
and gay!’  
‘I can always leave off talking when I hear a master  
play.’

## X

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time,  
one by one,  
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds  
as well undone,  
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never  
see the sun. 30

## XI

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand  
nor swerve,  
While I triumph o’er a secret wrung from nature’s  
close reserve,  
In you come with your cold music till I creep thro’  
every nerve.

## XII

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a  
house was burned:  
‘Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what  
Venice earned.’  
‘The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be  
discerned.’



## XIII

‘Yours for instance : you know physics, something of  
 geology,  
 ‘Mathematics are your pastime ; souls shall rise in their  
 degree :  
 ‘Butterflies may dread extinction,—you’ll not die, it  
 cannot be !

## XIV

‘As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom  
 and drop, 40  
 ‘Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly  
 were the crop :  
 ‘What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had  
 to stop ?

## XV

‘Dust and ashes !’ So you creak it, and I want the  
 heart to scold.  
 Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what’s become  
 of all the gold  
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms ? I feel chilly and  
 grown old. 45

## 12. MAY AND DEATH

## I

I wish that when you died last May,  
 Charles, there had died along with you  
 Three parts of spring’s delightful things ;  
 Ay, and, for me, the fourth part too.

## II

A foolish thought, and worse, perhaps !  
 There must be many a pair of friends  
 Who, arm in arm, deserve the warm  
 Moon-births and the long evening-ends,

## III

So, for their sake, be May still May !  
 Let their new time, as mine of old, 10  
 Do all it did for me : I bid  
 Sweet sights and sounds throng manifold.



## IV

Only, one little sight, one plant,  
 Woods have in May, that starts up green  
 Save a sole streak which, so to speak,  
 Is spring's blood, spilt its leaves between,—

## V

That, they might spare ; a certain wood  
 Might miss the plant ; their loss were small :  
 But I,—whene'er the leaf grows there,  
 Its drop comes from my heart, that's all. 20

## 13. ECHETLOS

Here is a story shall stir you ! Stand up, Greeks dead  
 and gone,  
 Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling  
 on,  
 Did the deed and saved the world, for the day was  
 Marathon !

No man but did his manliest, kept rank and fought  
 away  
 In his tribe and file : up, back, out, down—was the  
 spear-arm play :  
 Like a wind-whipt branchy wood, all spear-arms a-swing  
 that day !

But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no  
 spear,  
 As a flashing came and went, and a form i' the van,  
 the rear,  
 Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now  
 here.

Nor helmed nor shielded, he ! but, a goatskin all his  
 wear, 10  
 Like a tiller of the soil, with a clown's limbs broad  
 and bare,  
 Went he ploughing on and on : he pushed with a  
 ploughman's share.



Did the weak mid-line give way, as tunnies on whom  
the shark

Precipitates his bulk ? Did the right-wing half when,  
stark

On his heap of slain lay stretched Kallimachos Polema-  
rch ?

Did the steady phalanx falter ? To the rescue, at the  
need,

The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth  
of weed,

As he routed through the Sakian and rooted up the  
Mede.

But the deed done, battle won,—nowhere to be descried  
On the meadow, by the stream, at the marsh,—look far  
and wide

From the foot of the mountain, no, to the last blood-  
plashed seaside,—

Not anywhere on view blazed the large limbs thonged  
and brown,

Shearing and clearing still with the share before which  
—down

To the dust went Persia's pomp, as he ploughed for  
Greece, that clown !

How spake the Oracle ? 'Care for no name at all !

Say but just this : "We praise one helpful whom we call  
The Holder of the Ploughshare." The great deed ne'er  
small.'

Not the great name ! Sing—woe for the great name  
Miltiades

And its end at Paros isle ! Woe for Themistokles

—Satrap in Sardis court ! Name not the clown like  
these !

30

## 14. THE LABORATORY

### ANCIEN REGIME

#### I

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,  
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,  
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's smithy—  
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee ?







## IX

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought  
 My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought  
 Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would  
     fall  
 Shrivelled ; she fell not ; yet this does it all !

## X

Not that I bid you spare her the pain ;  
 Let death be felt and the proof remain :  
 Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—  
 He is sure to remember her dying face ! 40

## XI

Is it done ? Take my mask off ! Nay, be not morose ;  
 It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close :  
 The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee !  
 If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me ?

## XII

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,  
 You may kiss me, on my mouth if you will !  
 But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings  
 Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's !

## 15. TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

## I

I wonder do you feel to-day  
     As I have felt since, hand in hand,  
 We sat down on the grass, to stray  
     In spirit better through the land,  
 This morn of Rome and May ?

## II

For me, I touched a thought, I know,  
     Has tantalized me may times,  
 (Like turns of thread the spiders throw  
     Mocking across our path) for rhymes  
 To catch at and let go.



## III

Help me to hold it ! First it left  
 The yellowing fennel, run to seed  
 There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,  
 Some old tomb's ruin : yonder weed  
 Took up the floating weft,

## IV

Where one small orange cup amassed  
 Five beetles,—blind and green they grope  
 Among the honey-meal : and last,  
 Everywhere on the grassy slope  
 I traced it. Hold it fast !

20

## V

The champaign with its endless fleece  
 Of feathery grasses everywhere !  
 Silence and passion, joy and peace,  
 An everlasting wash of air—  
 Rome's ghost since her decease.

## VI

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,  
 Such miracles performed in play,  
 Such primal naked forms of flowers,  
 Such letting nature have her way  
 While heaven looks from its towers !

30

## VII

How say you ? Let us, O my dove,  
 Let us be unashamed of soul,  
 As earth lies bare to heaven above !  
 How is it under our control  
 To love or not to love ?

## VIII

I would that you were all to me,  
 You that are just so much, no more.  
 Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free !  
 Where does the fault lie ? What the core  
 O' the wound, since wound must be ?

40



## IX

I would I could adopt your will,  
 See with your eyes, and set my heart  
 Beating by yours, and drink my fill  
 At your soul's springs,—your part my part  
 In life, for good and ill.

## X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,  
 Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,  
 Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose  
 And love it more than tongue can speak—  
 Then the good minute goes. 50

## XI

Already how am I so far  
 Out of that minute? Must I go  
 Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,  
 Onward, whenever light winds blow,  
 Fixed by no friendly star?

## XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!  
 Where is the thread now? Off again!  
 The old trick! Only I discern—  
 Infinite passion, and the pain  
 Of finite hearts that yearn. 60

## 16. LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

## I

Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles,  
 Miles and miles  
 On the solitary pastures where our sheep  
 Half-asleep  
 Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop  
 As they crop—  
 Was the site of a city great and gay,  
 (So they say)  
 Of our country's very capital, its prince  
 Ages since  
 Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far  
 Peace or war. 10



## II

Now,—the country does not even boast a tree,  
     As you see,  
 To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills  
     From the hills  
 Intersect and give a name to, 'else they run  
     Into one)

Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires  
     Up like fires 20  
 O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall  
     Bounding all,  
 Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,  
     Twelve abreast.

## III

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass  
     Never was !  
 Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'er-spreads  
     And embeds  
 Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,  
     Stock or stone— 30  
 Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe  
     Long ago ;  
 Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame  
     Struck them tame ;  
 And that glory and that shame alike, the gold  
     Bought and sold.

## IV

Now,—the single little turret that remains  
     On the plains,  
 By the caper overrooted, by the gourd  
     Overscored, 40  
 While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks  
     Through the chinks—  
 Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time  
     Sprang sublime,  
 And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced  
     As they raced,  
 And the monarch and his minions and his dames  
     Viewed the games. 48



## V

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve  
Smiles to leave 50  
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece  
In such peace,  
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey  
Melt away—  
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair  
Waits me there  
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul  
For the goal,  
When the king looked, where she looks now, breath-  
less, dumb  
Till I come. 60

## VI

But he looked upon the city, every side,  
Far and wide,  
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'  
Colonnades,  
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then;  
All the men !  
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand  
Either hand  
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace  
Of my face, 70  
Ere we rush; ere we extinguish sight and speech  
Each on each.

## VII

In one year they sent a million fighters forth  
South and North,  
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high  
As the sky,  
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force --  
Gold, of course.  
Oh heart ! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns !  
Earth's returns 80  
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin !  
Shut them in,  
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest !  
Love is best. 84



## 17. BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

No more wine ? then we'll push back chairs and talk.  
 A final glass for me, though : cool, i' faith !  
 We ought to have our Abbey back, you see,  
 It's different, preaching in basilicas,  
 And doing duty in some masterpiece  
 Like this of brother Pugin's. bless his heart !  
 I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,  
 Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere ;  
 It's just like breathing in a lime-kiln : eh ?  
 These hot long ceremonies of our church  
 Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,  
 You take me—amply pay it ! Now, we'll talk. 10

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.  
 No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir !  
 Beside 'tis our engagement : don't you know:  
 I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,  
 We'd see truth dawn together ?—truth that peeps  
 Over the glasses' edge when dinner's done,  
 And body gets its sop and holds its noise  
 And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time : 20  
 Truth's break of day ! You do despise me then.  
 And if I say, 'despise me,'—never fear !  
 I know you do not in a certain sense—  
 Not in my arm-chair, for example : here,  
 I well imagine you respect my place  
 (*Status, entourage, worldly circumstance*)  
 Quite to its value—very much indeed :  
 —Are up to the protesting eyes of you  
 In pride at being seated here for once—  
 You'll turn it to such capital account ! 30  
 When somebody, through years and years to come,  
 Hints of the bishop,—names me—that's enough :  
 'Blougram ? I knew him'—(into it you slide)  
 'Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,  
 'All alone, we two ; he's a clever man :  
 'And after dinner,—why, the wine you know,—  
 'Oh, there was wine, and good !—what with the wine...  
 'Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk !  
 'He's no bad fellow, Blougram ; he had seen  
 'Something of mine he relished, some review : 40



'He's quite above their humbug in his heart,  
 'Half-said as much, indeed—the thing's his trade.  
 'I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times :  
 'How otherwise ? I liked him, I confess !'  
*Che che*, my dear sir, as we say at Rome,  
 Don't you protest now ! It's fair give and take ;  
 You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths :  
 The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—  
 You do depise me ; your ideal of life 50  
 Is not the bishop's : you would not be I.  
 You would like better to be Goethe, now,  
 Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,  
 Count D'Orsay,—so you did what you preferred,  
 Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,  
 Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,  
 So long as on that point, whate'er it was,  
 You loosed your mind, where whole and sole yourself.  
 —That, my ideal never can include,  
 Upon that element of truth and worth 60  
 Never be based ! for say they make me Pope—  
 (They can't—suppose it for our argument !)  
 Why, there I'm at my tether's end, I've reached  
 My height, and not a height which pleases you :  
 An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.  
 It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,  
 Of how some actor on a stage played Death,  
 With pasteboard crown, sham orb and tinselled dart,  
 And called himself the monarch of the world ;  
 Then, going in the tire-room afterward, 70  
 Because the play was done, to shift himself,  
 Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly,  
 The moment he had shut the closet door,  
 By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope  
 At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,  
 And whose part he presumed to play just now.  
 Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true !

So, drawing comfortable breath again,  
 You weigh and find, whatever more or less  
 I boast of my ideal realized



Is nothing in the balance when opposed  
 To your ideal, your grand simple life,  
 Of which you will not relize one jot.  
 I am much, you are nothing ; you would be all,  
 I would be merely much : you beat me there.  
 No, friend, you do not beat me : hearken why !  
 The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,  
 Is—not to fancy what were fair in life  
 Provided it could be,—but, finding first  
 What may be, then find how to make it fair  
 Up to our means : a very different thing !  
 No abstract intellectual plan of life  
 Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,  
 But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,  
 May lead within a world which (by your leave)  
 Is Rome or London, not Fool's-paradise.  
 Embellish Rome, idealize away,  
 Make paradise of London if you can,  
 You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

90

## A simile !

We mortals cross the ocean of this world  
 Each in his average cabin of a life ;  
 The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.  
 Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare ?  
 You come on shipboard with a landsman's list  
 Of things he calls convenient : so they are !  
 An India screen is pretty furniture,  
 A piano-forte is a fine resource,  
 All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,  
 The new edition fifty volumes long ;  
 And little Greek books: with the funny type  
 They get up well at Leipsic: fill the next :  
 Go on ! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes !  
 And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add !  
 'Twere pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow  
 Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,  
 Since he more than the others brings with him  
 Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese !—  
 Yet was not on your list before, perhaps.  
 —Alas, friend, here's the agent...is't the name ?  
 The captain, or whoever's master here—

100

110

120



You see him screw his face up ; what's his cry  
 Ere you set foot on shipboard ? 'Six feet square !'  
 If you won't understand what six feet mean,  
 Compute and purchase stores accordingly—  
 And if, in pique because he overhauls  
 Your Jerome, piano, bath, you came on board  
 Bare—why, you cut a figure at the first  
 While sympathetic landsmen see you off ;  
 Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,  
 You peep up from your utterly naked boards 130  
 Into some snug and well-appointed berth,  
 Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug—  
 Put back the other, but don't jog the ice !)  
 And mortified you mutter 'Well and good ;  
 'He sits enjoying his sea-furniture ;  
 'Tis stout and proper, and there's store of it :  
 'Though I've the better notion, all agree,  
 'Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,  
 'Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—  
 'I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all !' 140  
 And meantime you bring nothing : never mind—  
 You've proved your artist-nature : what you don't  
 You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting-place.  
 See my way : we're to college friends, suppose.  
 Prepare together for our voyage, then ;  
 Each note and check the other in his work,—  
 Here's mine, a bishop's outfit ; criticize !  
 What's wrong ? why won't you be a bishop too ?

Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't, 150  
 (Not statedly, that is, and fixedly  
 And absolutely and exclusively)  
 In any revelation called divine.  
 No dogmas nail your faith; and what remains  
 But say so, like the honest man you are?  
 First, therefore, overhaul theology!  
 Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,  
 Must find believing every whit as hard :  
 And if I do not frankly say as much,  
 The ugly consequence is clear enough. 160



Now wait, my friend : well, I do not believe—  
 If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,  
 Absolute and exclusive, as you say;  
 You're wrong—I mean to prove it in due time.  
 Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie  
 I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,  
 So give up hope accordingly to solve—  
 (To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then  
 With both of us, though in unlike degree,  
 Missing full credence—overboard with them! 170  
 I mean to meet you on your own premise :  
 Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,  
 Calm and complete, determinately fixed  
 To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray?  
 You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!  
 In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,  
 As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,  
 Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's  
 The gain? how can we guard our unbelief, 180  
 Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.  
 Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,  
 A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,  
 A chorus-ending from Euripides—,  
 And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears  
 As old and new at once as nature's self,  
 To rap and knock and enter in our soul,  
 Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,  
 Round the ancient idol, on his base again—  
 The grand Perhaps! Wo look on helplessly. 190  
 There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—  
 This good God,—what he could do, if he would,  
 Would, if he could—then must have done long since:  
 If so, when, where and how? some way must be—  
 Once feel about, and soon or late you hit  
 Some sense, in which it might be, after all.  
 Why not. 'The way, the Truth, the Life?'

—That way

Over the mountain, which who stands upon  
 Is apt to doubt if it be meant for a road;  
 While, if he views it from the waste itself, 200



Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,  
 Not vague, mistakeable! what's a break or two  
 Seen from the unbroken desert either side?  
 And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)  
 What if the breaks themselves should prove at last  
 The most consummate of contrivances  
 To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith?  
 And so we tumble at truth's very test!  
 All we have gained then by our unbelief  
 Is life of doubt diversified by faith, 210  
 For one of faith diversified by doubt  
 We called the chess-board white,—we call it black.

'Well', you rejoin, 'the end's no worse, at least  
 'We've reason for both colours on the board:  
 'Why not confess then, where I drop the faith  
 'And you the doubt, that I'm as right as you?'

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so  
 And both things even,—faith and unbelief  
 Left to a man's choice,—we'll proceed a step  
 Returning to our image, which I like. 220

A man's choice yes—but a cabin-passenger's—  
 The man made for the special life o' the world—  
 Do you forget him? I remember though!  
 Consult our ship's conditions and you find  
 One and but one choice suitable to all;  
 The choice, that you unluckily prefer,  
 Turning things topsy-turvy—they or it  
 Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief  
 Bears upon life, determines its whole course,  
 Begins at its beginning. See the world 230  
 Such as it is,—you made it not, nor I;  
 I mean to take it as it is,—and you,  
 Not so you'll take it,—though you get nought else.  
 I know the special kind of life I like,  
 What suits the most my idiosyncrasy  
 Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit  
 In power peace pleasantness and length of days.  
 I find that positive belief does this  
 For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.  
 —For you, it does, however?—that, we'll try! 240



'Tis clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,  
 Induce the world to let me peaceably,  
 Without declaring at the outset, 'Friends,  
 'I absolutely and peremptorily  
 'Believe!'—I say, faith is my waking life :  
 One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,  
 We know, but waking's the main point with us,  
 And my provision's for life's waking part.  
 Accordingly, I use heart head and hand  
 All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends ; 250  
 And when night overtakes me, down I lie  
 Sleep dream a little, and get done with it  
 The sooner the better, to begin afresh.  
 What's midnight doubt before the dayspring's faith ?  
 You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,  
 That recognize the night, give dreams their weight—  
 To be consistent you should keep your bed,  
 Abstain from healthy acts that prove you man,  
 For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares !  
 And certainly at night you'll sleep and dream, 260  
 Live through the day and bustle as you please.  
 And so you live to sleep as I to wake,  
 To unbelieve as I to still believe?  
 Well, and the common sense o' the world calls you  
 Bed-ridden,—and its good things come to me.  
 Its estimation, which is half the fight,  
 That's the first-cabin comfort I secure:  
 The next...but you perceive with half an eye!  
 Come, come, it's best believing, if we may;  
 You can't but own that!

Next, concede again, 270

If once we choose belief, on all accounts  
 We can't be too decisive in our faith,  
 Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,  
 To suit the world which gives us the good things.  
 In every man's career are certain points  
 Whereon he dares not be indifferent;  
 The world detects him clearly, if he dare,  
 As baffled at the game, and losing life.  
 He may care little or he may care much  
 For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose, 280



Since various theories of life and life's  
 Success are extant which might easily  
 Comport with either estimate of these;  
 And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,  
 Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool  
 Because his fellow would choose otherwise:  
 We let him choose upon his own account  
 So long as he's consistent with his choice.  
 But certain points, left wholly to himself,  
 When once a man has arbitrated on, 290  
 We say he must succeed there or go hang.  
 Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most  
 Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need—  
 For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch,  
 Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,  
 The form of faith his conscience holds the best,  
 Whate'er the process of conviction was:  
 For nothing can compensate his mistake  
 On such a point, the man himself being judge :  
 He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul. 300

Well now, there's one great form of Christian faith  
 I happened to be born in—which to teach  
 Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,  
 As best and readiest means of living by;  
 The same on examination being proved  
 The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise  
 And absolute form of faith in the whole world—  
 Accordingly, most potent of all forms  
 For working on the world. Observe, my friend !  
 Such as you know me, I am free to say, 310  
 In these hard latter days which hamper one,  
 Myself—by no immoderate exercise  
 Of intellect and learning, but the tact  
 To let external forces work for me,  
 —Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread;  
 Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,  
 Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world  
 And make my life an ease and joy and pride;  
 It does so,—which for me's a great point gained,  
 Who have a soul and body that exact 320  
 A comfortable care in many ways.



There's power in me and will to dominate  
 Which I must exercise, they hurt me else:  
 In many ways I need mankind's respect,  
 Obedience, and the love that's born of fear:  
 While at the same time, there's a taste I have,  
 A toy of soul, a titillating thing,  
 Refuses to digest these dainties crude.  
 The naked life is gross till clothed upon:  
 I must take what men offer, with a grace  
 As though I would not, could I help it, take!  
 An uniform I wear though over-rich—  
 Something imposed on me, no choice of mine.  
 No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake  
 And despicable therefore! now folk kneel  
 And kiss my hand—of course the Church's hand  
 Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,  
 And thus that it should be I have procured;  
 And thus it could not be another way,  
 I venture to imagine.

330

You'll reply,

340

So far my choice, no doubt, is a success;  
 But were I made of better elements,  
 With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,  
 I hardly would account the thing success  
 Though it did all for me I say.

But, friend,

We speak of what is; not of what might be,  
 And how 'twere better if 'twere otherwise,  
 I am the man you see here plain enough:  
 Grant I'm a beast, why, beasts must lead beasts' lives!  
 Suppose I own at once to tail and claws;  
 The tailless man exceeds me; but being tailed  
 I'll lash out lion-fashion, and leave apes  
 To dock their stump and dress their haunches up,  
 My business is not to remake myself,  
 But make the absolute best of what God made.  
 Or—our first simile—though you prove me doomed  
 To a viler berth stil to the steerage-hole  
 The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive  
 To make what use of each were possible;  
 And as this cabin gets upholstery,  
 That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

350

360



But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast  
 I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes  
 Enumerated so complacently;  
 On the mere ground that you forsooth can find  
 In this particular life I choose to lead  
 No fit provision for them. Can you not?  
 Say you, my fault is I address myself  
 To grosser estimators than should judge?  
 And that's no way of holding up the soul, 370  
 Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows  
 One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools'—  
 Would like the two, but, forced to choose takes that.  
 I pine among my million imbeciles  
 (You think) aware some dozen men of sense  
 Eye me and know me, whether I believe  
 In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,  
 And am a fool, or disbelieve in her  
 And am a knave,—approve in neither case,  
 Withhold their voices though I look their way; 380  
 Like Verdi when, at this worst opera's end  
 (The thing they gave at Florence,—what's its name?)  
 While the mad houseful's plaudits near outbang  
 His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,  
 He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths  
 Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here—  
 That even your prime men who appraise their kind  
 Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,  
 See more in a truth than the truth's simple self, 390  
 Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street  
 Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?  
 You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack,  
 Him you must watch—he's sure to fall, yet stands!  
 Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.  
 The honest thief, the tender murderer,  
 The superstitious atheist, demired  
 That loves and saves her soul in new French books—  
 We watch while these in equilibrium keep.  
 The giddy line midway : one step aside, 400  
 They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line  
 Before your sages,—just the men to shrink



From the gross weights, coarse scales and labels broad  
 You offer their refinement. Fool or knave ?  
 Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave  
 When there's a thousand diamond weights between ?  
 So, I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you'll find,  
 Profess themselves indignant, scandalized  
 At thus being held unable to explain  
 How a superior man who disbelieves 410  
 May not believe as well : that's Schelling's way !  
 It's through my coming in the tail of time,  
 Nicking the minute with a happy tact.  
 Had I been born three hundred years ago  
 They'd say, 'What's strange ? Blougram of course  
     believes ;'  
 And, seventy years since, 'disbeleives of course.'  
 But now, 'He may believe ; and yet, and yet  
 'How can he ?' All eyes turn with interest.  
 Whereas, step off the line on either side—  
 You, for example, clever to a fault, 420  
 The rough and ready man who write apace,  
 Read somewhat sel'domer, think perhaps even less—  
 You disbelieve ! Who wonders and who cares ?  
 Lord So-and-so—his coat bedropped with wax,  
 All Peter's chains about his waist, his back  
 Brave with the needlework of Noodledom—  
 Believes ! Again, who wonders and who cares ?  
 But I, the man of sense and learning too,  
 The able to think yet act, the this, the that,  
 I, to believe at this late time of day ! 430  
 Enough ; you see, I need not fear contempt.

—Except it's yours ! Admire me as these may,  
 You don't. But whom at least do you admire ?  
 Present your own perfection, your ideal,  
 Your pattern man for a minute—oh, make haste !  
 Is it Napoleon you would have us grow ?  
 Concede the means ; allow his head and hand,  
 (A large concession, clever as you are)  
 Good ! In our common primal element  
 Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know— 440  
 We're still at that admission, recollect !)  
 Where do you find—apart from towering o'er



The secondary temporary aims  
Which satisfy the gross taste you despise—  
Where do you find his star?—his crazy trust  
God knows through what or in what? it's alive  
And shines and leads him, and that's all we want,  
Have we aught in our sober night shall point  
Such ends as his were, and direct the means  
Of working out our purpose straight as his, 450  
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success  
With after-care to justify the same?  
—Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve—  
Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away!  
What's the vague good o' the world, for which you  
dare  
With comfort to yourself blow millions up?  
We neither of us see it! we do see  
The blown-up million—spatter of their brains  
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,  
In that bewildering entanglement 460  
Of horrible eventualities  
Past calculation to the end of time!  
Can I mistake for some clear word of God  
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)  
His puff of hazy instinct, idle talk,  
'The State, that's I, quack-nonsense about crowns,  
And (when one beats the man to his last hold)  
A vague idea of setting things to rights,  
Policing people efficaciously,  
More to their profit most of all to his own; 470  
The whole to end that dimmest of ends  
By an Austrian marriage cant to us the Church;  
And resurrection of the old *regime*?  
Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,  
Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such?  
No: for, concede me but the merest chance  
Doubt may be wrong—there's judgment, life to come!  
With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right?  
This present life is all?—you offer me  
Its dozen noisy years, without a chance 480  
That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,  
And getting called by divers new-coined names,  
Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,



Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like !  
Therefore I will not.

Take another case ;  
Fit up the cabin yet another way.  
What say you to the poets ? shall we write  
Hamlet, Othello—make the world our own,  
Without a risk to run of either sort ?  
I can't !—to put the strongest reason first. 490  
'But try', you urge. 'the trying shall suffice ;  
'The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life :  
'Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate !'  
Spare my self-knowledge there's no fooling me !  
If I prefer remaining my poor self,  
I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.  
If I'm a Shakespeare, let the well alone ;  
Why should I try to be what now I am ?  
If I'm no Shakespeare, as too probable,—  
His power and consciousness and self-delight 500  
And all we want in common, shall I find—  
Trying for ever ? while on points of taste  
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I  
Are dowered alike—I'll ask you, I or he,  
Which in our two lives realizes most ?  
Much, he imagined—somewhat, I possess.  
He had the imagination ; stick to that !  
Let him say, 'In the face of my soul's works  
'Your world is worthless and I touch it not  
'Lest I should wrong them'—I'll with-draw my plea. 510  
But does he say so ? look upon his life !  
Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.  
He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces  
To built the trimmest house in Stratford town ;  
Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,  
Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute ;  
Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,  
And none more, had he seen its entry once,  
Than 'Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal.'  
Why then I should who play that personage, 520  
The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made ;  
Be told that had the poet chanced to start  
From where I stand now (some degree like mine



Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)  
 He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,  
 And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays ?  
 Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best !  
 Did Shakespeare live, he could but sit at home  
 And get himself in dreams the Vatican,  
 Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls, 530  
 And English Books, none equal to his own,  
 Which I read, bound in gold (he never did).  
 —Terni's fall, Naples' bay and Gothard's top—  
 Eh, friend ? I could not fancy one of these ;  
 But, as I pour this claret there they are :  
 I've gained them—crossed St. Gothard last July  
 With ten mules to the carriage and a bed  
 Slung inside ; is my hap the worse for that ?  
 We want the same things, Shakespeare and myself,  
 And what I want, I have : he, gifted more, 540  
 Could fancy he too had them when he liked,  
 But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,  
 He would not have them also in my sense.  
 We play one game ; I send the ball aloft  
 No less adroitly that of fifty strokes  
 Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high  
 Which sends them back to me : I wish and get.  
 He struck balls higher and with better skill,  
 But at a poor fence level with his head,  
 And hit—his Stratford house, a coat of arms, 550  
 Successful dealings in his grain and wool,—  
 While I receive heaven's incense in my nose  
 And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.  
 As<sup>x</sup> him, if this life's all, who wins the game ?

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up.  
 Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat ;  
 Only, we can't command it ; fire and life  
 Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree :  
 And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,  
 The fact's the same,—belief's fire, once in us, 560  
 Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself :  
 We penetrate our life with such a glow  
 As fire lends wood and iron—~~this~~ turns steel,  
 That burns to ash—all's one, fire proves its power



For good or ill, since men call flare success.  
 But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.  
 Light one in me, I'll find it food enough !  
 Why, to be Luther—that's a life to lead,  
 Incomparably better than my own.  
 He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says, 570  
 Sets up God's rule again by simple means,  
 Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.  
 He flared out in the flaring of mankind ;  
 Such Luther's luck was : how shall such be mine ?  
 If he succeeded, nothing's left to do :  
 And if he did not altogether—well,  
 Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be  
 I might be also. But to what result ?  
 He looks upon no future : Luther did.  
 When can I gain on the denying side ? 580  
 Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,  
 Read the text right, emancipate the world—  
 The emancipated world enjoys itself  
 With scarce a thank-you : Blougram told it first  
 It could not owe a farthing,—not to him  
 More than Saint Paul ! 'twould press its pay, you  
 think ?  
 Then add there's still that plaguy hundredth chance  
 Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—  
 For what gain ? not for Luther's, who secured  
 A real heaven in his heart throughout his life, 590  
 Supposing death a little altered things.

'Ay, but since really you lack faith,' you cry,  
 'You run the same risk really on all sides,  
 'In cool indifference as bold unbelief.  
 'As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him.  
 'It's not worth having, such imperfect faith.  
 'No more available to do faith's work  
 'Than unbelief like mine. Whole faith, or none !'

Softly, my friend ! I must dispute that point.  
 Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith. 600  
 We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith :  
 I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.  
 The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,



If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does ?  
 By life and man's free will, God gave for that !  
 To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice :  
 That's our one act, the previous work's his own.  
 You criticize the soul ? it reared this tree—  
 This broad life and whatever fruit it bears !  
 What matter though I doubt at every pore, 610  
 Head-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,  
 Doubts in the trivial work of every day,  
 Doubts at the very bases of my soul  
 In the grand moments when she probes herself—  
 If finally I have a life to show,  
 The thing I did, brought out in evidence  
 Against the thing done to me underground  
 By hell and all its brood, for aught I know ?  
 I say, whence sprang this ? shows it faith or doubt ?  
 All's doubt in me ; where's break of faith in this ? 620  
 It is the idea, the feeling and the love,  
 God means mankind should strive for and show forth  
 Whatever be the process to that end,  
 And not historic knowledge, logic sound,  
 And metaphysical acumen, sure !  
 'What think ye of Christ,' friend ? when all's done and  
 said,  
 Like you this Christianity or not ?  
 It may be false, but will you wish it true ?  
 Has it your vote to be so if it can ?  
 Trust you an instinct silenced long ago 630  
 That will break silence and enjoin you love  
 What mortified philosophy is hoarse,  
 And all in vain, with bidding you despise ?  
 If you desire faith—then you've faith enough :  
 What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves ?  
 You form a notion of me, we'll suppose,  
 On hearsay ; it's a favourable one .  
 'But still' (you add), 'there was no such good man,  
 'Because of contradiction in the facts.  
 'One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome, 640  
 'This Blougram ; yet throughout the tales of him  
 'I see he figures as an Englishman.'  
 Well, the two things are reconcilable.  
 But would I rather you discovered that,



Subjoining—‘Still, what matter though they be ?  
 ‘Blougram concerns me nought, born here or there,’

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask !  
 Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,  
 Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much  
 The sense of conscious creatures to be borne. 650  
 It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.  
 Some think, Creation’s meant to show him forth :  
 I say it’s meant to hide him all it can,  
 And that’s what all the blessed evil’s for.  
 Its use in Time is to environ us,  
 Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough  
 Against that sight till we can bear its stress.  
 Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain  
 And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart  
 Less certainly would wither up at once 660  
 Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.  
 But time and earth case-harden us to live ;  
 The feeblest sense is trusted most, the child  
 Feels God a moment, ichors o’er the place,  
 Plays on and grows to be a man like us.  
 With me, faith means perpetual unbelief  
 Kept quiet like the snake ’neath Michael’s foot  
 Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.  
 Or, if that’s too ambitious,—here’s my box—  
 I need the excitation of a pinch 670  
 Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose  
 Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.  
 ‘Leave it in peace’ advise the simple folk :  
 Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,  
 Say I—let doubt occasion still more faith !

You’ll say, once all believed, man, woman, child.  
 In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.  
 How you’d exult if I could put you back  
 Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,  
 Geology, ethnology, what not, 680  
 (Greek endings, each the little passing-bell  
 That signifies some faith’s about to die),  
 And set you square with Genesis again,—  
 When such a traveller told you his last news,



He saw the ark a-top of Ararat  
 But did not climb there since 'twas getting dusk  
 And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot !  
 How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,  
 How act ? As other people felt and did :  
 With soul more blank than this decanter's knob, 690  
 Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate  
 Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be !

No, when the fight begins within himself,  
 A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,  
 Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—  
 He's left, himself, i' the middle : the soul wakes  
 And grows. Prolong that battle through his life !  
 Never leave growing till the life to come !  
 Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks  
 That used to puzzle people wholesomely : 700  
 Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.  
 What are the laws of nature, not to bend  
 If the Church bid them ?—brother Newman asks  
 Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—  
 On to the rack with faith !—is my advice.  
 Will not that hurry us upon our knees,  
 Knocking our breasts, 'It can't be—yet it shall !  
 'Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope ?  
 'Low things confound the high things !' and so forth.  
 That's better than acquitting God with grace 710  
 As some folk do. He's tried—no case is proved,  
 Philosophy is lenient—he may go !

You'll say, the old system's not so obsolete  
 But men believe still : ay, but who and where ?  
 King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet  
 The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes ;  
 But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint  
 Believes God watches him continually,  
 As he believes in fire that it will burn.  
 Or rain that it will drench him ? Break fire's law, 720  
 Sin against rain, although the penalty  
 Be just a singe or soaking ? 'No, he smiles ;  
 'Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves.'

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,  
 My faith's still greater, then my faith's enough.



I have read much, thought much, experienced much.  
 Yet would die rather than a vow my fear  
 The Naples' liquefaction may be false,  
 When set to happen by the palace-clock  
 According to the clouds or dinner-time. 730  
 I hear you recommend, I might at least  
 Eliminate, decrassify my faith  
 Since I adopt it ; keeping what I must  
 And leaving what I can—such points as this.  
 I won't—that is, I can't throw one away.  
 Supposing there's no truth in what I hold  
 About the need of trials to man's faith,  
 Still, when you bid me purify the same,  
 To such a process I discern no end.  
 Clearing off one excrescence to see two, 740  
 There's ever a next in size, how grown as big,  
 That meets the knife : I cut and cut again !  
 First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last  
 But Fichte's clever cut at God himself ?  
 Experimentalize on sacred things !  
 I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain  
 To stop betimes : they all get drunk alike.  
 The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste  
 As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned, 750  
 Nor see more danger in it,—you retort.  
 Your taste's worth mine ; but my taste proves more  
 wise

When we consider that the steadfast hold  
 On the extreme end of the chain of faith  
 Gives the advantage, makes the difference  
 With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule :  
 We are their lords, or they are free of us,  
 Just as we tighten or relax our hold.  
 So, other matters equal, we'll revert  
 To the first problem—which, if solved my way 760  
 And thrown into the balance, turns the scale —  
 How we may lead a comfortable life,  
 How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time  
 How narrowly and grossly I view life,



Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule  
 The masses, and regard complacently  
 'The cabin', in our old phrase. Well, I do.  
 I act for, talk for, live for this world now,  
 As this world prizes action, life and talk : 770  
 No prejudice to what next world may prove,  
 Whose new laws and requirements, my best pledge  
 To observe then, is that I observe these now,  
 Shall do hereafter what I do meanwhile  
 Let us concede (gratuitously though)  
 Next life relieves the soul of body, yields  
 Pure spiritual enjoyment : well, my friend,  
 Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use  
 May be to make the next life more intense ?

Do you know, I have often had a dream 780  
 (Work it up in your next month's article)  
 Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still  
 Losing true life for ever and a day  
 Through ever trying to be and ever being—  
 In the evolution of successive spheres—  
*Before* its actual sphere and place of life,  
 Halfway into the next, which having reached,  
 It shoots with corresponding foolery  
 Halfway into the next still, on and off ! 789  
 As when a traveller, bound from North to South,  
 Scouts fur in Russia : what's its use in France ?  
 In France spurns flannel : where's its need in Spain ?  
 In Spain drops cloth, too cumbrous for Algiers !  
 Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,  
 A superfluity at Timbuctoo.  
 When, through his journey, was the fool at ease ?  
 I'm at ease now, friend ; worldly in this world,  
 I take and like its way of life ; I think  
 My brothers, who administer the means,  
 Live better for my comfort—that's good too ; 800  
 And God, if he pronounce upon such life,  
 Approves my service, which is better still.  
 If he keep silence,—why, for you or me  
 Or that brute beast pulled-up in to-day's 'Times',  
 What odd is't, save to ourselves, what life we lead ?

You meet me at this issue : you declare,—



All special-pleading done with—truth is truth,  
 And justifies itself by undreamed ways.  
 You don't fear but it's better, if we doubt,  
 To say so, act up to our truth perceived 810  
 However feebly. Do then,—act away !  
 'Tis there I'm on the watch for you. How one acts  
 Is, both of us agree, our chief concern :  
 And how you'll act is what I fain would see  
 If, like the candid person you appear,  
 You dare to make the most of your life's scheme  
 As I of mine, live up to its full law  
 Since there's no higher law that counter-checks.  
 Put natural religion to the test  
 You've just demolished the revealed with—quick, 820  
 Down to the root of all that checks your will,  
 All prohibition to lie, kill and thief,  
 Or even to be an atheistic priest !  
 Suppose a pricking to incontinence—  
 Philosophers deduce you chastity  
 Or shame, from just the fact that at the first  
 Whoso embraced a woman in the field,  
 Threw club down and forewent his brain beside,  
 So, stood a ready victim in the reach  
 Of any brother savage, club in hand; 830  
 Hence saw the use of going out of sight  
 In wood or cave to prosecute his loves :  
 I read this in a French book t'other day.  
 Does law so analysed coerce you much ?  
 Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,  
 But you who reach where the first thread begins,  
 You'll soon cut that !—which means you can, but  
     won't,  
 Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned out,  
 You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,  
 But there they are, and so you let them rule. 840  
 Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,  
 A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,  
 Without the good the slave expects to get,  
 In case he has a master after all !  
 You own your instincts ? why, what else do I,  
 Who want, am made for, and must have a God



Ere I can be aught, do aught ?—no more name  
 Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,  
 To wit, a relation from that thing to me,  
 Touching from head to foot—which touch I feel, 850  
 And with it take the rest, this life of ours !  
 I live my life here ; yours you dare not live.

—Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)  
 Disfigure such a life and call it names.  
 While, to your mind, remains another way  
 For example men : knowledge and power have rights,  
 But ignorance and weakness have rights too.  
 There needs no crucial effort to find truth  
 If here or there or anywhere about :  
 We ought to turn each side, try hard and see, 860  
 And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least  
 The right, by one laborious proof the more,  
 To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.  
 Men are not angels, neither are they brutes :  
 Something we may see, all we cannot see.  
 What need of lying ? I say, I see all,  
 And swear to each detail the most minute  
 In what I think a Pan's face—you, mere cloud :  
 I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,  
 For fear, if once I drop the emphasis, 870  
 Mankind may doubt there's any cloud at all.  
 You take the simple life—ready to see.  
 Willing to see (for no cloud's worth a face)—  
 And leaving quiet what no strength can move,  
 And which, who bids you move ? who has the right ?  
 I bid you ; but you are God's sheep, not mine :  
 '*Pastor est tui Dominus.*' You find  
 In this the pleasant pasture of our life  
 Much you may eat without the least offence,  
 Much you don't eat because your maw objects, 880  
 Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock  
 Open great eyes at you and even butt,  
 And thereupon you like your mates so well  
 You cannot please yourself, offending them ;  
 Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,  
 You weigh your pleasure with their butts and bleats  
 And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears



Restrain you, real checks since you find them so ;  
 Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks :  
 And thus you graze through life with not one lie, 890  
 And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name ?  
 If so, you beat—which means you are not I—  
 Who needs must make earth mine and feed my filth  
 Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,  
 But motioned to the velvet of the sword  
 By those obsequious wethers' very selves.  
 Look at me, sir ; my age is double yours :  
 At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,  
 What now I should be—as, permit the word,  
 I pretty well imagine your whole range 900  
 And stretch of tether twenty years to come.  
 We both have minds and bodies much alike :  
 In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,  
 My daily bread, my influence and my state ?  
 You're young. I'm old ; you must be old one day ;  
 Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,  
 Women their lovers kneel to, who cut curls,  
 From your fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch—  
 Dukes, who petition just to kiss your ring—  
 With much beside you know or may conceive ? 910  
 Suppose we die to-night : well, here am I,  
 Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,  
 While writing all the same my articles  
 On music, poetry, the fictile vase  
 Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon's Greek.  
 But you—the highest honour in your life,  
 The thing you'll crown yourself with, all your days,  
 Is—dining here and drinking this last glass  
 I pour you out in sign of amity  
 Before we part for ever. Of your power 920  
 And social influence, worldly worth in short,  
 Judge what's my estimation by the fact,  
 I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,  
 Hint secrecy on one of all these words !  
 You're shrewd and know that should you publish one  
 The world would brand the lie—my enemies first,  
 Who'd sneer—'the bishop's an arch-hypocrite



'And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool'.  
 Whereas I should not dare for both my ears  
 Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile, 930  
 Before the chaplain who reflects myself—  
 My shade's so much more potent than your flesh.  
 What's your reward, self-abnegating friend ?  
 Stood you confessed of those exceptional  
 And privileged great natures that dwarf mine—  
 A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,  
 A poet just about to print his ode,  
 A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,  
 An artist whose religion is his art—  
 I should have nothing to object : such men 940  
 Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,  
 Their drugget's worth my purple, they beat me.  
 But you,—you're just as little those as I—  
 You, Gigadibs, who thirty years of age,  
 Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine,  
 Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul  
 Unseized by the Germans yet—which view you'll  
 print—

Meantime the best you have to show being still  
 That lively lightsome article we took  
 Almost for the true Dickens,—what's its name ? 950  
 'The Slum and Cellar, or Whitechapel life  
 'Limned after dark !' it made me laugh, I know,  
 And pleased a month, and brought you in ten pounds.  
 —Success I recognize and compliment,  
 And therefore give you, if you choose, three words  
 (The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)  
 Which whether here, in Dublin or New York,  
 Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,  
 Such terms never you aspired to get  
 In all our own reviews and some not ours. 960  
 Go write your lively sketches ! be the first  
 'Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence'—  
 Or better simply say, 'The Outward-bound.'  
 Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth  
 As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad  
 About me on the church door opposite.  
 You will not wait for that experience though,



I fancy, howsoever you decide,  
To discontinue—not detesting, not  
Defaming, but at least—despising me !

970

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour  
Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*  
*Episcopus, nec non*—(the deuce knows what  
It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)  
With Gigadibs the literary man,  
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,  
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,  
While the great bishop rolled him out a mind  
Long crumpled, till ceased consciousness lay smooth.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke. 980  
The other portion, as he shaped it thus  
For argumentatory purposes,  
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.

Some arbitrary accidental thoughts  
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,  
He chose to represent as mixtures there,  
Invariable convictions (such they seemed  
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards  
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)  
While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak tongue  
Is never bold to utter in their truth 991

Because styled hell-deep ('tis an old mistake  
To place hell at the bottom of the earth)  
He ignored these,—not having in readiness  
Their nomenclature and philosophy :  
He said true things, but called them by wrong names.

'On the whole,' he thought, 'justify myself  
'On every point where cavillers like this  
'Oppugn my life : he tries one kind of fence,  
'I close, he's worsted, that's enough for him. 1000  
'He's on the ground : if ground should break away  
'I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet  
'Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.  
'His ground was over mine and broke the first :  
'So, let him sit with me this many a year !'

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week



Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.  
 Something had struck him in the 'Outward-bound'  
 Another way than Blougram's purpose was :  
 And having bought, not cabin-furniture 1010  
 But settler's implements (enough for three)  
 And started for Australia--there, I hope,  
 By this time he has tested his first plough,  
 And studied his last chapter of St. John. 1014

## 18. PICTOR IGNOTUS

FLORENCE, 15—

I could have painted pictures like that youth's  
 Ye praise so. How my soul springs up ! No bar  
 Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!  
 —Never did fate forbid me, star by star,  
 To outburst on your night with all my gift  
 Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk  
 From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift  
 And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk  
 To the centre, of and instant ; or around  
 Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan 10  
 The licence and the limit, space and bound,  
 Allowed to truth made visible in man.  
 And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,  
 Over the canvas could my hand have flung,  
 Each face obedient to its passion's law,  
 Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue ;  
 Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,  
 A-tipoe for the blessing of embrace,  
 Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood  
 Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place ; 20  
 Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,  
 And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—  
 O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup ?  
 What did ye give me that I have not saved ?  
 Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well !)  
 Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,  
 As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell  
 To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,



Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,  
 Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went, 30  
 Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,  
 Through old streets named afresh from the event,  
 Till it reached home, where learned age should greet  
 My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct  
 Above his hair, lie learning at my feet !—

Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked  
 With love about, and praise; till life should end,  
 And then not go to heaven, but linger here,  
 Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—  
 The thought grew frightful, 'twas so widely dear! 40  
 But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights  
 Have scared me, like the revels through a door  
 Of some strange house of idols at its rites !

This world seemed not the world it was before :  
 Mixed with my loving ones, there trooped

Who summoned those cold faces that begun  
 To press on me and judge me ? Though I stooped  
 Shrinking, a . from the soldiery a nun,  
 They drew me forth, and spite of me...enough !

These buy and sell our pictures, take and give, 50  
 Count them for garniture and household-stuff,

And where they live needs must our pictures live  
 And see their faces, listen to their prate,  
 Partakers of their daily pettiness,

Discussed of,—‘This I love, or this I hate,  
 ‘This likes me more, and this affects me less !’

Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles  
 My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint

These eadless cloisters and eternal aisles

With the tame series, virgin, Babe and Saint, 60  
 With the same cold calm beautiful regard,—

At least no merchant traffics in my heart ;  
 The sanctuary's gloom at least stall ward

Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart:  
 Only prayer breaks the silence of shrine

While, blackening in the daily candlesmoke,  
 They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,

'Mid echoes the light footstep never works  
 So, die my pictures ! surely, gently die !



O youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its  
 worth ? 70  
 Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry ?  
 Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth ?

## 19. THE YEAR'S AT THE SPRING

The year's at the spring  
 And day's at the morn ;  
 Morning's at seven ;  
 The hill-side's dew-pearled ;  
 The lark's on the wing ;  
 The snail's on the thorn ;  
 God's in his heaven—  
 All's right with the world !

20. 'TRANSCENDENTALISM : A POEM IN  
TWELVE BOOKS'

Stop playing, poet ! May a brother speak ?  
 'Tis you speak, that's your error. Song's our art :  
 Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts  
 Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.  
 —True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to treasure  
 up !

But why such long prolusion and display,  
 Such turning and adjustment of the harp,  
 And taking it upon your breast, at length,  
 Only to speak dry words across its strings ?  
 Stark-naked thought is in request enough : 10  
 Speak prose and hollo it till Europe hears !  
 The six-foot Swiss tube, braced about with bark,  
 Which helps hunter's voice from Alp to Alp—  
 Exchange our harp for that,—why hinders you ?  
 But here's your fault ; grown men want thought,  
 you think ;

Thought's what they mean by verse, and seek in verse.  
 Boys seek for images and melody,  
 Men must have reason—so, you aim at men.  
 Quite otherwise ! Objects throng our youth, 'tis true ;  
 We see and hear and do not wonder much : 20  
 If you could tell us what they mean, indeed ;  
 As German Boehme never cared for plants



Until it happed, a-walking in the fields'  
 He noticed all at once that plants could speak,  
 Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk with him.  
 That day the daisy had an eye inded—  
 Colloquized with the cowslip on such themes !  
 We find them extant yet in Jacob's prose.  
 But by the time youth slips a stage or two  
 While reading prose in that tough book he wrote 30  
 (Collating and emendating the same  
 And settling on the sense most to our mind),  
 We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.  
 Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—  
 Another Boehme with a tougher book  
 And subtler meanings of what roses say, —  
 Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,  
 John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about ?  
 He with a 'look you !' vents a brace of rhymes,  
 And in there breaks the sudden rose herself, 40  
 Over us, under, round us every side,  
 Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs  
 And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all,—  
 Buries us with a glory, young once more,  
 Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

So come, the harp back to your heart again !  
 You are a poem, though your poem's naught.  
 The best of all you showed before, believe,  
 Was your own boy-face o'er the finer chords  
 Bent, following the cherub at the top 50  
 That points to God with his paired halfmoon wings,

## 21. HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

I only knew one poet in my life :  
 And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,  
 A man of mark, to know next time you saw.  
 His very serviceable suit of black  
 Was courtly once and conscientious still,  
 And many might have worn it though none did :  
 The cloak, that somewhat shone and showed the  
 threads,  
 Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.



He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane, 10  
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,  
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.  
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,  
That leads nowhither ; now, they breathed themselves  
On the main promenade just at the wrong time :  
You'd come upon his scrutinizing hat,  
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself  
Against the single window spared some house  
Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—  
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick 20  
Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks  
Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.  
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,  
The man who slices lemons into drink;  
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys  
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.  
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,  
And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,  
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.  
He took such cognizance of men and things, 30  
If any beat a horse, yeu felt he saw ;  
If any cursed a woman, he took note ;  
Yet stared at nobody,—you stared at him,  
And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,  
He seemed to know you and expect as much.  
So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,  
It marked the shameful and notorious fact,  
We had among us, not so much a spy,  
As a recording chief-inquisitor,  
The town's true master if the town but knew ! 40  
We merely kept a governor for form,  
While this man walked about and took account  
Of all thought, said and acted, the went home,  
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King  
Who has an itch to know things, he knows why,  
And reads them in his bedroom of a night,  
Oh, you might smile ! there wanted not a touch,  
A tang of...well, it was not wholly ease  
As back into your mind the man's look came.  
Stricken in years a little,—such a brow 50  
His eyes had to live under !—clear as flint



On either side the formidable nose  
 Curved, cut and coloured like an eagle's claw.  
 Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate?  
 When altogether old B. disappeared  
 And young C. got his mistress,—was't our friend,  
 His letter to the King, that did it all?  
 What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?  
 Our Lord the King has favourites manifold  
 And shifts his ministry some once a month;  
 Our city gets new governors at whiles,—  
 But never word or sign, that I could hear,  
 Notified to this man about the streets  
 The King's approval of those letters conned  
 The last thing duly at the dead of night.  
 Did the man love his office? Frowned our Lord,  
 Exhorting when none heard—'Beseech me not!  
 'Too far above my people,—beneath me!  
 'I set the watch,—how should the people know?  
 'Forget them, keep me all the more in mind!  
 Was some such understanding 'twixt the two?

60

70

I found no truth in one report at least—  
 That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes  
 Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,  
 You found he ate his supper in a room  
 Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,  
 And twenty naked girls to change his plate!  
 Poor man, he lived another kind of life  
 In that rew stuccoed third house by the bridge,  
 Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise!  
 The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,  
 Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,  
 Playing a decent cribbage with his maid  
 (Jacynth, you're sure her name was) o'er the cheese  
 And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,  
 Or treat of radishes in April. Nine,  
 Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.

80

My father, like the man of sense he was,  
 Would point him out to me a dozen times;  
 'St—'St', he'd whisper, 'the Corregidor!  
 I had been used to think that personage  
 Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,

90



And feathers like a forest in his hat,  
 Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,  
 Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,  
 And memorized the miracle in vogue !  
 He had a great observance from us boys ;  
 We were in error ; that was not the man.

• I'd like now, yet had happy been afraid,  
 To have just looked, when this man came to die, 100  
 And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides  
 And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,  
 With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.  
 Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,  
 Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,  
 Doing the King's work all the dim day long,  
 In his old coat and up to knees in mud,  
 Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—  
 And, now the day was won, relieved at once !  
 No further show or need for that old coat, 110  
 You are sure, for one thing ! Bless us, all the while  
 How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I !  
 Well, I could never write a verse,—could you ?  
 Let's to the Prado and make the most of time. 114

### AN EPISTLE OF KARSHISH

CONTAINING THE STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF  
 KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN.

Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,  
 The not-incurious in God's handiwork  
 (This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,  
 Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,  
 To coop up and keep down on earth a space  
 That puff of vapour from its mouth, man's soul)  
 —To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,  
 Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,  
 Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks  
 Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain, 10  
 Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip  
 Back and rejoin its source before the term,—  
 And aptest in contrivance (under God)  
 To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—  
 The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home



Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace)  
 Three samples of true snakestone—rarer still,  
 One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,  
 (But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)  
 And writeth now the twenty-second time. 20

My journeyings were brought to Jericho :  
 Thus I resume. Who studious in our art  
 Shall count a little labour unrepaid ?  
 I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone  
 On many a flinty furlong of this land.  
 Also, the country-side is all on fire  
 With rumours of a marching hitherward.  
 Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.  
 A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear ;  
 Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls : 30  
 I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.  
 Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,  
 And once a town declared me for a spy ;  
 But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,  
 Since this poor covert where I pass the night,  
 This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence  
 A man with plague-sores at the third degree  
 Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here !  
 'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,  
 To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip 40  
 And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.  
 A viscid choler is observable  
 In tertians, I was nearly bold to say ;  
 And falling-sickness hath a happier cure  
 Than our school wots of : there's a spider here  
 Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,  
 Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back ;  
 Take five and drop them...but who knows his mind,  
 The Syrian runagate I trust this to ?  
 His service payeth me a sublimate 50  
 Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.  
 Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,  
 There set in order my experiences,  
 Gather what most deserves, and give thee all—  
 Or I might add, Judaea's gum-tragacanth  
 Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,



Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,  
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease  
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—  
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar— 60  
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay : my Syrian blinketh gratefully,  
Protesteth his devotion is my price—  
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal ?  
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,  
What set me off a writing first of all.  
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang !  
For, be it this town's barrenness—or else  
The man had something in the look of him—  
His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth. 70  
So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose  
In the great press of novelty at hand  
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)  
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,  
Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth ?  
The very man is gone from me but now,  
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.  
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all !

'Tis but a case of mania—subinduced  
By epilepsy, at the turning-point 80  
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days :  
When, by the exhibition of some drug  
Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art  
Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,  
The evil thing out-breaking all at once  
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed—  
But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,  
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,  
The first conceit that entered might inscribe  
Whatever it was minded on the wall 90  
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,  
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent  
Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls  
The just-retained and new-established soul  
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart  
That henceforth she will read or these or none.  
And first—man's own firm conviction rests  
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)



—That he was dead and then restored to life  
 By a Nazarene physician of his tribe : 100  
 —'Sayeth, the same bade 'Rise', and he did rise.  
 'Such cases are diurnal,' thou wilt cry  
 Not so this figment !—not, that such a fume,  
 Instead of giving way to time and health,  
 Should eat itself into the life of life,  
 As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all !  
 For see, how he takes up the after-life.  
 The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,  
 Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,  
 The body's habit wholly laudable, 110  
 As much, indeed, beyond the common health  
 As he were made and put aside to show.  
 Think, could we penetrate by any drug  
 And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,  
 And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep !  
 Whence has the man the balm that brightens all ?  
 This grown man eyes the world now like child.  
 Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,  
 Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,  
 To bear my inquisition. While they spoke, 120  
 Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—  
 He listened not except I spoke to him,  
 But folded his two hands and let them talk,  
 Watching the flies that buzzed : and yet no fool.  
 And that's a sample how his years must go.  
 Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,  
 Should find a treasure,—can he use the same  
 With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,  
 And take at once to his impoverished brain  
 That sudden element that changes things, 130  
 The sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand  
 And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust ?  
 Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—  
 Warily parsimonious, when no need,  
 Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times ?  
 All prudent counsel as to what befits  
 The golden mean, is lost on such an one :  
 The man's fantastic will is the man's law.  
 So here—we call the treasure knowledge, say,  
 Increased beyond the fleshly faculty— 140



Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,  
 Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven :  
 The man is witless of the size, the sum,  
 The value in proportion of all things,  
 Or whether it be little or be much.  
 Discourse to him of prodigious armaments  
 Assembled to besiege his city now,  
 And of the passing of a mule with gourds—  
 'Tis one ! Then take it on the other side,  
 Speak of some trifling fact,—he will gaze rapt 150  
 With stupor at its very littleness,  
 (Far as I see) as if in that indeed  
 He caught prodigious import, whole results;  
 And so will turn to us the bystanders  
 In ever the same stupor (note this point)  
 That we too see not with his opened eyes.  
 Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,  
 Preposterously, at cross purposes.  
 Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look  
 For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,  
 Or pretermission of the daily craft ! 160  
 While a word, gesture, glance from that same child  
 At play or in the school or laid asleep,  
 Will startle him to an agony of fear,  
 Exasperation, just as like. Demand  
 The reason why—' 'tis but a word,' object—  
 'A gesture'—he regards thee as our lord  
 Who lived there in the pyramid alone,  
 Looked at us (dost thou mind ?) when, being young,  
 We both would unadvisedly recite 170  
 Some charm's beginning, from the book of his,  
 Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst  
 All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.  
 Thou and the child have each a veil alike.  
 'Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both  
 Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match  
 Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know !  
 He holds on firmly to some thread of life—  
 (It is the life to lead perforcedly)  
 Which runs across some vast distracting orb 180  
 Of glory on either side that meagre thread,  
 Which, conscious of, he much not enter yet—



The spiritual life around the earthly life ;  
 The law of that is known to him as this,  
 His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.  
 So is the man perplexed with impulses  
 Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,  
 Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,  
 And not along, this black thread through the blaze—  
 'It should be' baulked by 'here it cannot be'. 190  
 And oft the man's soul springs into his face  
 As if he saw again and heard again  
 His sage that bade him 'Ris-' and he did rise.  
 Something, a word, a tick o' the blood within  
 Admonishes : then back he sinks at once  
 To ashes, who was very fire before,  
 In sedulous recurrence to his trade  
 Whereby he earneth him the daily bread,  
 And studiously the humbler for that pride,  
 Professedly the faultier that he knows 200  
 God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.  
 Indeed the especial marking of the man  
 Is prone submission to the heavenly will—  
 Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.  
 'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last  
 For that same death which must restore his being  
 To equilibrium, body loosening soul  
 Divorced even now by premature full growth ;  
 He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live  
 So long as God please, and just how God please. 210  
 He even seeketh not to please God more  
 (Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.  
 Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach  
 The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,  
 Make proselytes as madman thirst to do ;  
 How can he give his neighbour the real ground,  
 His own 'conviction ? Ardent as he is—  
 Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old  
 'Be it as God please' reassureth him.  
 I probed the sore as thy disciple should : 220  
 'How, beast,' said I, 'this stolid carelessness  
 Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march  
 'To stamp out like a little spark thy town,  
 'Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once ?



He merely looked with his large eyes on me.  
 The man is apathetic, you deduce ?  
 Contariwise, he loves both old and young,  
 Able and weak, affects the very brutes  
 And birds—how say I ? flowers of the field—  
 As a wise workman recognizes tools 230  
 In a master's workshop, loving what they make.  
 Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb :  
 Only impatient, let him do his best,  
 At ignorance and carelessness and sin—  
 An indignation which is promptly curbed :  
 As when in certain travel I have feigned  
 To be an ignoramus in our art  
 According to some preconceived design,  
 And happed to hear the land's practitioners  
 Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance, 240  
 Prattle fantastically on disease,  
 Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace !

Thou wilt object—Why have I not ere this  
 Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene  
 Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,  
 Conferring with the frankness that befits ?  
 Alas ! it grieveth me, the learned leech  
 Perished in a tumult many years ago,  
 Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry,  
 Rebellion, to the setting up a rule 260  
 And creed prodigious as described to me.  
 His death, which happened when the earthquake fell  
 (Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss  
 To occult learning in our lord the sage  
 Who lived there in the pyramid alone)  
 Was wrought by the mad people—that's their wont !  
 On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,  
 To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—  
 How could he stop the earthquake ?

That's their way ! 270  
 The other imputations must be lies :  
 But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,  
 In mere respect for any good man's fame.  
 (And after all, our patient Lazarus  
 Is stark mad ; should we count on what he says ?  
 Perhaps not : though in writing to a leech



'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)  
 This man so cured regards the curer, then,  
 As—God forgive me ! who but God himself,  
 Creator and sustainer of the world, 280  
 That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile !  
 —'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived  
 Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,  
 Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,  
 And yet was.....what I said nor choose repeat  
 And must have so avouched himself, in fact,  
 In hearing of this very Lazarus  
 Who saith—but why all this of what he saith ?  
 Why write of trivial matters, things of price  
 Calling at every moment for remark ? 290  
 I noticed on the margin of a pool  
 Blue-flowering boarage, the Aleppo sort,  
 Aboundeth very nitrous. It is strange !

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,  
 Which, now that I review it, needs must seem  
 Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth !  
 Nor I myself discern in what is writ  
 Good cause for the peculiar interest  
 And awe indeed this man has touched me with.  
 Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness 300  
 Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus :  
 I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills  
 Like an old lion's cheek-teeth Out there came  
 A moon made like a face with certain spots  
 Multifform, manifold and menacing :  
 Then a wind rose behind me. So we met  
 In this old sleepy town at unaware  
 The man and I. I send thee what is writ.  
 Regard it as a chance, a matter risked  
 To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose, 310  
 Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.  
 Jerusalem's repose shall make amends

For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine ;  
 Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell !  
 The very God ! think, Abib ; does thou think ?  
 So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—  
 So, through the thunder comes a human voice  
 Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here !



'Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself !  
 'Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine, 320  
 'But love I gave thee, with myself to love,  
 'And thou must love me who have died for thee !'  
 The madman saith He said so : it is strange. 323

## 23. FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave !  
 You need not clap your torches to my face.  
 Zooks, what's to blame ? you think you see a monk !  
 What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,  
 And here you catch me at an alley's end  
 Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar ?  
 The Carmine's my cloister : hunt it up,  
 Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,  
 Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,  
 And nip each softling of a wee white mouse, 10  
*Weke, weke*, that's crept to keep him company !  
 Aha, you know your betters ! Then, you'll take  
 Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,  
 And please to know me likewise Who am I ?  
 Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend  
 Three streets off—he's a certain .. how d'ye call ?  
 Master—a .. Cosimo of the Medici,  
 I' the house that caps the corner. Boh ! you were  
 best !  
 Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,  
 How you affected such a gullet's-gripe ! 20  
 But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves  
 Pick up a manner nor discredit you :  
 Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets  
 And count fair prize what comes into their net ?  
 He's Judas to a tittle, that man is !  
 Just such a face ! Why, sir, you make amends.  
 Lord, I'm not angry ! Bid your hangdogs go  
 Drink out this quarter-florin to the health  
 Of the munificent House that harbours me  
 (And many more beside, lads more beside !) 30  
 And all's come square again. I'd like his face—  
 His, elbowing on his comrade in the door  
 With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds  
 John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair



With one hand ('Look you, now,' as who should say)  
 And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped !  
 It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,  
 A wood-coal or the like ? or you should see !  
 Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.  
 What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down, 40  
 You know them and they take you ? like enough !  
 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—  
 'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.  
 Let's sit and set things straight now hip to haunch.  
 Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands  
 To roam the town and sing out carnival,  
 And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,  
 A-painting for the great man, saints and saints !  
 And saints again. I could not paint all night—  
 Ouf ! I leaned out of window for fresh air. 50  
 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,  
 A sweep of lute strings, laughs, and whiffs of song—  
*Flower o' the broom,*  
*Take away love, and our earth is a tomb !*  
*Flower o' the quince,*  
*I let Lisa go, and what good in life since ?*  
*Flower o' the thyme*—and so on. Round they went.  
 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter  
 Like the skipping of rabbits by moon-light,—three slim  
shapes,  
 And a face that looked up .....zooks, sir, flesh and  
blood, 60  
 That's all I'm made of ! Into shreds it went,  
 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,  
 All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,  
 There was a ladder ! Down I let myself,  
 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,  
 And after them. I came up with the fun  
 Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met—  
*Flower o' the rose,*  
*If I've been merry, what metter who knows ?*  
 And so as I was stealing back again 70  
 To get to bed and have a bit of sleep  
 Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work  
 On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast  
 With his great round stone to subdue the flesh.



You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see !  
 Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—  
 Mine's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting's in that !  
 If Master Cosimo announced himself,

Mum's the word naturally ; but a monk !

Come, what am I a beast for ? tell us, now !

80

~~I was a baby when my mother died~~

~~And father died and left me in the street.~~

I starved there, God knows how, a year or two

On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,

Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,

My stomach being empty as your hat,

The wind doubled me up and down I went.

Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,

(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)

And so along the wall, over the bridge,

90

By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,

While I stood munching my first bread that month :

'So, boy, you're minded,' quoth the good fat father

Wiping his own mouth 'twas refection time—

'To quit this very miserable world ?

'Will you renounce' 'the mouthful of bread ?' thought I;

By no means ! Brief, they made a monk of me ;

I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,

Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking house,

~~Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici—~~

100

~~Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.~~

Well, sir, I found in time you may be sure,

'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,

The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,

And day-long blessed idleness beside !

'Let's see what the urchin's fit for'—that came next.

Not overmuch their way, I must confess.

Such a to-do ! They tried me with their books :

Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste !

*Flower o' the clove,*

110

*All the Latin I construe is, 'amo' I love !*

But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets

Eight years together, as my fortune was,

Wathing folk's faces to know who will fling

The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,

And who will curse or kick him for his pains—



Which gentleman processional and fine,  
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament,  
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch  
 The droppings of the wax to sell again, 120  
 Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped—  
 How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop  
 His bone from the heap of offal in the street—  
 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,  
 He learns the look of things, and none the less  
 For admonition from the hunger-pinch.  
 I had a store of such remarks, be sure,  
 Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.  
 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,  
 Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge, 130  
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,  
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,  
 And made a string of pictures of the world  
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,  
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked  
 black.

'Nay,' quoth the Prior, 'turn him out, d'ye say?  
 'In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.  
 'What if at last we get our man of parts,  
 'We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese 140  
 'And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine  
 'And put the front on it that ought to be!  
 And hereupon he bade me daub away.  
 Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,  
 Never was such prompt disemburdening.  
 First, every sort of monk, the black and white,  
 I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,  
 From good old gossips waiting to confess  
 Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,— 150  
 To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,  
 Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there  
 With the little children round him in a row  
 Of admiration, half for his beared and half  
 For that white anger of his victim's son  
 Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,  
 Signing himself with the other because of Christ  
 (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this  
 After the passion of a thousand years)



Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,  
 (Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve  
 On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf, 160  
 Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers  
 (The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.  
 I painted all, then cried ' 'Tis ask and have ;  
 'Choose, for more's ready !'—laid the ladder flat,  
~~And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.~~  
~~The monks closed in a circle and praised loud~~  
 Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,  
 Being simple bodies,—'That's the very man !  
 'Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog !  
 'That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes 170  
 But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd ;  
 Their betters took their turn to see and say :  
 The Prior and the learned pulled a face  
 And stopped all that in no time. 'How ? what's  
 here ?  
 'Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all !  
 'Faces, arms, legs and bodies like a true  
 'As much as pea and pea ! it's devil's-game !  
 'Your business is not to catch men with show,  
 'With homage to the perishable clay,  
 'But lift them over it, ignore it all, 180  
 'Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.  
 'Your business is to paint the souls of men—  
 'Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke..... no, it's not.....  
 'It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—  
 '(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)  
 'It's..... well, what matters talking, it's the soul !  
 'Give us no more of body than shows soul !  
 'Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,  
 'That sets us praising,—why not stop with him ?  
 'Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head 190  
 'With wonder at lines, colours, and what not ?  
 'Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms !  
 'Rub all out, try at it a second time.  
 'Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts  
 'She's just my niece..... Herodias, I would say,—  
 'Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off !  
 'Have it all out !' Now, is this sense, I ask ?  
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body



So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further  
 And can't fare worse ! Thus, yellow does for white  
 When what you put for yellow's simply black,  
 And any short of meaning looks intense 202  
 When all beside itself mean and looks nought.

Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,  
 Left foot and right foot, go a double step,  
 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,  
 Both in their order ? Take the prettist face,  
 The Prior's niece... patron-saint—is it so pretty  
 You can't discover if it means hope, fear,  
 Sorrow or joy ? won't beauty go with these ? 210

Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,  
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,  
 And then add soul and heighten them threefold ?  
 Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—  
 (I never saw it—put the case the same—)  
 If you get simple beauty and nought else,  
 You get about the best thing God invents :  
 That's somewhat : and you'll find the soul you have  
 missed,

Within yourself, when you return him thanks  
 'Rub all out !' Well, well, there's my life, in short,  
 And so the thing has gone on ever since. 221

I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds :

You should not take a fellow eight years old  
 And make him swear to never kiss the girls.

I'm my own master, paint now as I please—

Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house !

Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front—

Those great rings serve more purposes than just  
 To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse !

And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes  
 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work, 231

The heads shake still—'It's art's decline, my son !

'You're not of the true painters, great and old ;

'Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find ;

'Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer :

'Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third !'

*Flower o' the pine,*

*You keep your mistr.....manners, and I'll stick to  
 mine !*



I'm not the third, then : bless us, they must know !  
 Don't you think they're the likeliest to know, 240  
 They with ~~their~~ Latin ? So, I swallow my rage,

Clench my teeth, such my lips in tight, and paint  
 To please them—sometimes do and sometime don't ;  
 For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come  
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—  
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—

*(Flower o' the peach,*

*Death for us all, and his own life for each !)*

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,  
 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream, 250  
 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,

And play the fooleries you catch me at,  
 In pure rage ! The old mill-horse, out at grass  
 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,  
 Although the miller does not preach to him  
 The only good of grass is to make chaff.

What would men have ? Do they like grass or no—  
 May they or mayn't they ? all I want's the thing  
 Settled for ever one way. As it is,

You tell too many lies and hurt yourself. 260

You don't like what you only like too much,  
 You do like what, if given you to your word,  
 You find abundantly detestable.

For me, I think I speak as I was taught ;

I always see the garden and God there

A making man's wife : and, my lesson learned,

The value and significance of flesh,

I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me : I'm a beast, I know.

But see, now—why, I see as certainly 270

As that the morning star's about to shine,  
 What will hap some day. We've a youngster here  
 Comes to our convent, studies what I do,

Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop :  
 His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—  
 They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—  
 He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,  
 I hope so—though I never live so long,

I know what's sure to follow. You be judge !

You speak no Latin more than I, belike ; 280



However, you're my man, you've seen the world  
 —The beauty and the wonder and the power,  
 The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
 Changes, surprises,—and God made it all !  
 —For what ? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,  
 For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,  
 The mountain round it and the sky above,  
 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,  
These are the frame to ? What's it all about ?  
To be passed over, despised ? or dwelt upon, 290  
Wondered at ? oh, this last of course !—you say.  
 But why not do as well as say,—paint these  
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it ?  
 God's works—paint any one, and count it crime  
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, 'His works  
 'Are here already ; nature is complete :  
 'Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)  
 'There's no advantage ! you must beat her, then.'  
 For, don't you mark ? we're made so that we love  
 First when we see them painted, things we have  
 passed 300

Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;  
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that ;  
 God uses us to help each other so,  
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,  
 Your cullion's hanging face ? A bit of chalk,  
 And trust me but you should, though ! How much more,  
 If I drew higher things with the same truth !  
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,  
 Interpret God to all of you ! Oh, oh, 310  
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do  
 And we in our graves ! This world's no blot for us,  
 Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :  
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink.  
 'Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer !'  
 Strikes in the Prior : 'when your meaning's plain  
 'It does not say to folk—remember matins,  
 'Or, mind you fast next Friday !' Why, for this  
 What need of art at all ? A skull and bones,  
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best, 320  
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.



I painted a Saint Laurence six months since  
 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style :  
 'How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down ?'  
 I ask a brother : 'Hugely,' he returns—  
 'Already not one phiz of your three slaves  
 'Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,  
 'But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,  
 'The pious people have so eased their own  
 'With coming to say prayers there in a rage : 330  
 'We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.  
 'Expect another job this time next year,  
 'For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—  
 'Your painting serves its purpose !' Hang the fools !

—That is—you'll not mistake an idle word  
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk. God wot,  
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns  
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine !  
Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now !  
It's natural a poor monk out of bounds 340  
Should have his apt word to excuse himself :  
 And hearken how I plot to make amends.  
 I have bethought me : I shall paint a piece  
 ...There's for you ! Give me six months, then go, see  
 Something in Sant' Ambrogio's ! Bless the nuns !  
 They want a cast o' my office, I shall paint  
 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,  
 Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,  
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet  
 As puff of grated orris-root 350  
 When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.  
 And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—  
 Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,  
 Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white  
 The convent's friends and gives them a long day,  
 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,  
 The man of Uz (and Us without the z,  
 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these  
 Secured at their devotion, up shall come  
 Out of a corner when you least expect, 360  
 As one by a dark stair into a great light,  
 Music and talking, who but Lippo ! I !—  
 Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I'm the man !



Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear ?  
 I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,  
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,  
 I, in this presence, this pure company !  
 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape ?  
 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing  
 Forward, puts out a soft palm—'Not so fast !' 370  
 —Addresses the celestial presence. 'nay—  
 'He made you and devised you, after all,  
 'Though he's none of you ! Could Saint John there  
 draw—

'His camel-hair make up a painting-brush ?  
 'We come to brother Lippo for all that,  
 '*Iste perfecit opus !*' So, all smile—  
 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face  
 Under the cover of a hundred wings  
 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay  
 And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut, 380  
 Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops  
 The hothead husband ! Thus I scuttle off  
 To some safe bench behind, not letting go  
 The palm of her, the little lily thing  
 That spoke the good word for me in the nick,  
 Like the Prior's niece...Saint Lucy, I would say.  
 And so all's saved for me, and for the church  
 A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence !  
 Your hand, sir, and good-bye : no lights, no lights !  
 The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,  
 Don't fear me ! There's the grey beginning Zooks ! 391

#### 24. CLEON

'As certain also of your own poets have said'—  
 [An Imaginary person. The poet quoted by St. Paul was  
 Aretus, a native of Tarsus.]

Cleon the poet (from the sprinkled isles,  
 Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,  
 And laugh their pride when the light wave lisps  
 'Greece')—

To Protus in his Tyranny : mush health !

They give thy letter to me, even now :  
 I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.  
 The master of thy galley still unlades



Gift after gift ; they block my court at last  
 And pile themselves along its portico  
 Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee : 10  
 And one white slave from the group dispersed  
 Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work  
 Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift;  
 Now covered with this settle-down of doves),  
 One lyric woman, in her crocus vest  
 Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands  
 Commends to me the strainer and the cup  
 Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence !  
 For so shall men remark, in such an act 20  
 Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,  
 Thy recognition of the use of life ;  
 Nor call thy spirit barely adequate  
 To help on life in straight ways, broad enough  
 For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.  
 Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,—  
 Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,  
 Or through him lulls of unapparent growth,  
 Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim  
 Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,— 30  
 Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake—  
 Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope  
 Of some eventual rest a-top of it,  
 Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,  
 Thou first of men mightst look out to the East :  
 The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.  
 For this, I promise on thy festival  
 To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,  
 Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak  
 Thy great words, and describe thy royal face— 40  
 Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,  
 Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.  
 It is as thou hast heard : in one short life  
 I, Cleon, have effected all those things  
 Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.  
 That epos on thy hundred plates of gold  
 Is mine,—and also mine the little chant,  
 So sure to rise from every fishing-bark



When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net. 50  
 The image of the sun-god on the phare,  
 Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine ;  
 The Poecile,<sup>1</sup> o'er-storied its whole length,  
 As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.  
 I know the proportions of a man  
 And woman also, not observed before ;  
 And I have written three books on the soul,  
 Proving absurd all written hitherto,  
 And putting us to ignorance again.  
 For music,—why, I have combined the moods, 60  
 Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine ;  
 Thus much the people know and recognize,  
 Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.  
 We of these latter days, with greater mind  
 Than our forerunners, since more composite,  
 Look not so great, beside their simple way,  
 To a judge who only sees one way at once,  
 One mind-point and no other at a time,—  
 Compares the small part of a man of us  
 With some whole man of the heroic age, 70  
 Great in his way—not ours, nor meant for ours.  
 And ours is greater, had we skill to know ;  
 For, what we call this of men on earth,  
 This sequence of the soul's achievements here  
 Being, as I find much reason to conceive,  
 Intended to be viewed eventually  
 As a great whole, not analysed to parts,  
 But each part having reference to all,—  
 How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,  
 Endure effacement by another part ? 80  
 Was the thing done ?—then, what's to do again ?  
 See, in the chequered pavement opposite,  
 Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,  
 And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid—  
 He did not overlay them, superimpose  
 The new upon the old and blot it out,  
 But laid them on a level in his work,  
 Making at last a picture ; there it lies.  
 So, first the perfect separate forms were made,  
 The portions of mankind ; and after, so, 90

1 The famous painted Porch on the Agora in Athens.



Occurred the combination of the same.  
 For where had been a progress, otherwise ?  
 Mankind, made up of all the single men,—  
 In such a synthesis the labour ends.  
 Now mark me ! those divine men of old time  
 Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point  
 The outside verge that rounds our faculty ;  
 And where they reached, who can do more than reach?  
 It takes but little water just to touch  
 At some one point the inside of a sphere, 100  
 And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest  
 In due succession : but the finer air  
 Which not so palpably nor obviously,  
 Though no less universally, can touch  
 The whole circumference of that emptied sphere,  
 Fills it more fully than the water did ;  
 Holds thrice the weight of water in itself  
 Resolved into a subtler element.  
 And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full  
 Up to the visible height—and after, void ; 110  
 Not knowing air's more hidden properties.  
 And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus  
 To vindicate his purpose in our life :  
 Why stay we on the earth unless to grow ?  
 Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,  
 That he or other god descended here  
 And, once for all, showed simultaneously  
 What, in its nature, never can be shown,  
 Piecemeal or in succession ;—showed, I say,  
 The worth both absolute and relative 120  
 Of all his children from the birth of time,  
 His instruments for all appointed work,  
 I now go on to image,—might we hear  
 The judgment which should give the due to each,  
 Show where the labour lay and where the ease,  
 And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere !  
 This is a dream :—but no dream, let us hope,  
 That years and days, the summers and the springs,  
 Follow each other with unwaning powers.  
 The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far, 130  
 Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock ;  
 The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe ;



The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet ;  
 The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers ;  
 That young and tender crescent-moon, the slave,  
 Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,  
 Refines upon the women of my youth.  
 What, and the soul alone deteriorates ?  
 I have not chanted verse like Homer, no—  
 Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor carved 140  
 And painted men like Phidias and his friend :  
 I am not great as they are, point by point.  
 But I have entered into sympathy  
 With these for, running these into one soul,  
 Who, separate, ignored other's art.  
 Say, is it nothing that I know them all ?  
 The wild flower was the larger ; I have dashed  
 Rose-blood upon its, priked its cup's  
 Honey wine, and driven its seed to fruit,  
 And show a better flower if not so large : 150  
 I stand myself. Refer this to the gods  
 Whose gift alone it is ! which, shall I dare  
 (All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext  
 'That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,  
 Discourse of lightly or depreciate ?  
 It might have fallen to another's hand : what then ?  
 I pass too surely : let at least truth stay !

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.  
 This being with me as I declare, O king,  
 My works, in all these varicoloured kinds, 160  
 So done by me, accepted so by men—  
 Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts)  
 I must not be accounted to attain  
 The very crown and proper end of life ?  
 Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,  
 I face death with success in my right hand :  
 Whether I fear death less than dost thyself  
 The fortunate of men ? 'For' (writest thou)  
 'Thou leavest much behind, while I leave nought.  
 'Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing, 170  
 'The pictures men shall study ; while my life,  
 'Complete and whole now in its power and joy,  
 'Dies altogether with my brain and arm,  
 'Is lost indeed ; since, what survives myself ?



'The brazen statue to o'erlook my grave,  
 'Set on the promonotory which I named.  
 'And that—some supple coutier of my heir  
 'Shall use its robe and sceptred arm, perhaps,  
 'To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.  
 'I go then : triumph thou, who dost not go !' 180

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.  
 Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse  
 Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,  
 That admiration grows as knowledge grows ?  
 That imperfection means perfection hid,  
 Reserved in part, to grace the after-time ?  
 If, in the morning of philosophy,  
 Ere aught had been recorded, nay perceived,  
 'Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst have looked  
 On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird, 190  
 Ere man, her last, appeared upon the stage—  
 'Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and deduced  
 'The perfectness of others yet unseen.  
 Conceding which,—had Zeus then questioned thee  
 'Shall I go on a step, improve on this,  
 'Do more for visible creatures than is done ?  
 'Thou wouldst have answered, 'Ay, by making each  
 'Grow conscious in himself—by that alone.  
 'All's perfect else : the shell sucks fast the rock, 199  
 'The fish strikes through the sea, the snake both swims  
 'And sides, forth range the beasts, the birds take flight,  
 'Till life's mechanics can no further go—  
 'And all this joy in natural life is put  
 'Like fire from off thy finger into each,  
 'So exquisitely perfect is the same.  
 'But 'tis pure fire, and they mere matter are ;  
 'It has them, not they it : and so I choose  
 'For man, thy last premeditated work  
 '(If I might add a glory to the scheme)  
 'That a third thing should stand apart from both, 210  
 'A quality arise within his soul,  
 'Which, intro-active, made to supervise  
 'And feel the force it has, may view itself,  
 'And so be happy.' Man might live first  
 The animal life : but is there nothing more ?



In due time, let him critically learn  
 How he lives ; and, the more he gets to know  
 Of his own life's adaptabilities,  
 The more joy-giving wiving will his life become.  
 Thus man, who hath this quality, is best. 220

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said :  
 'Let progress end at once,—man make no step  
 'Beyond the natural man, the better beast.  
 'Using his senses, not the sense of sense.  
 In man there's failure, only since he left  
 The lower and unconscious forms of life.  
 We called it advance, the rendering plain  
 Man's spirit might grow conscious of man's life,  
 And, by new lore so added to the old,  
 Take each step higher over the brute's head. 230

This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,  
 Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,  
 Which whole surrounding flats of natural life  
 Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to ;  
 A tower that crowns a country. But alas,  
 The soul now climbs it just to perish there !  
 For thence we have discovered ('tis no dream—  
 We know this, which we had not else perceived)  
 That there's a world of capability

For joy, spread round about us, meant for us, 240  
 Inviting us ; and still the soul craves all,  
 And still the flesh replies, 'Take no jot more  
 'Than ere thou clombst the tower to look abroad !  
 'Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought  
 'Deduction to it.' We struggle, fain to enlarge  
 Our bounded physical reciprocity,

Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,  
 Repair the waste of age and sickness : no,  
 It skills not ! life's inadequate to joy, 250  
 As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take.  
 They praise a fountain in my garden here  
 Wherein a Naiad sends the water-bow  
 Thin from her tube ; she smiles to see it rise.  
 What if I told her, it is just a thread  
 From that great river which the hills shut up,  
 And mock her with my leave to take the same ?  
 The artificer has given her one small tube



Past power to widen or exchange—what boots  
 To know she might spout oceans if she could ?  
 She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread : 260  
 And so a man can use but a man's joy  
 While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to boast,  
 'See, man, how happy I live, and despair—  
 'That I may be still happier—for thy use !'  
 If this were so, we could not thank our lord,  
 As hearts beat on to doing ; 'tis not so—  
 Malice it is not. Is it carelessness ?  
 Still, no. If care—where is the sign ? I ask,  
 And got no answer, and agree in sum,  
 O king, with thy profound discouragement, 270  
 Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.  
 Most progress is most failure : thou sayest well.

The last point now :—thou dost except a case—  
 Holding joy not impossible to one  
 With artist-gifts—to such a man as I  
 Who leave behind me living works indeed ;  
 For, such a poem, such a painting lives.  
 What ? dost thou verily trip upon a word,  
 Confound the accurate view of what joy is 279  
 (Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine)  
 With feeling joy ? confound the knowing how  
 And showing how to live (my faculty)  
 With actually living ?—Otherwise  
 Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king  
 Because in my great epos I display  
 How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act—  
 Is this as though I acted ? if I paint,  
 Carve the young Phœbus, am I therefore young ?  
 Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself  
 The many years of pain that taught me art ! 290  
 Indeed, to know is something, and to prove  
 How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more :  
 But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.  
 Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there  
 Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.  
 I can write love-odes : thy fair, love's an ode.  
 I get to sing of love, when grown too grey  
 For being beloved : she turns to that young man,  
 The muscles all a-ripple on his back.



I know the joy of kingship: well, thou art king. 300

‘But,’ sayest thou—(and I marvel, I repeat,  
To find thee trip on such a mere word) ‘what  
‘Thou writest, paintest, stays ; that does not die :  
‘Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,  
‘And Æschylus, because we read his plays !’  
Why, if they live still, let them come and take  
Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,  
Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive ?  
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,

In this, that every day my sense of joy 310

Grows more adute, my soul (intensified  
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen ;  
While every day my hairs fall more and more,  
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—  
The horror quickening still from year to year,  
The consummation coming past escape

When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—  
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,  
Being present still to mock me in men’s mouths,  
Alive still, in the praise of such as thou, 320

I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,  
The man who loved his life so over-much,  
Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,  
I dare at times imagine to my need  
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,  
Unlimited in capability

For joy, as this is in desire for joy,  
—To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us ;  
That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait  
On purpose to make prized the life at large— 330

Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,  
We burst there as the worm into the fly,  
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no !  
Zeus has not yet revealed it ; and alas,  
He must have done so, were it possible !

Live long and happy, and in that thought die :  
Glad for what was ! Farewell. And for the rest,  
I cannot tell thy messenger aright

Where to deliver what he bears of thine 340  
To one called Paulus ; we have heard his fame  
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—



I know not, nor am troubled much to know,  
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,  
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcized,  
Hath access to a secret shut from us ?  
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,  
In stooping to inquire of such an one,  
As if his answer could impose at all !  
He writeth, doth he ? well, and he may write.  
Oh, the Jew findeth scholars ! certain slaves 350  
Who touched on this same isle, preached him and  
Christ ;  
And (as I gathered from a bystander)  
Their doctrine could be held by no sane man. 353







## NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS







## NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS

### 1. CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME

Analysis and the Gist of the poem has been given in the *Special Introduction* before.

The years of Browning's Italian sojourn left palpable traces not only upon the landscape background which glows behind his human figures but on his way of conceiving and rendering the whole relation between Nature and Man. They did not make him in any sense a Nature poet. The Nature Browning knew and loved was well within sight of humanity and it was commonly brought nearer by some intrusive verges of man's work. Browning had always had an alert eye for the elements of human suggestion in landscape. But his rendering of landscape before the Italian period was habitually that of a brilliant, graphic, but not deeply interested artist. This hard objective brilliance does not altogether disappear from the work of his Italian period. But it tends to give way to a strangely subtle interpretation of the visible scene with the passion of the seeing soul. Nature is not more alive, but her life thrills and palpitates in subtler relation with the life of man. The author of *Men and Women* is a greater poet of Nature than the author of the *Lyrics and Romances*, because he is, also, a greater poet of "soul" for his larger command of soul-life embraces just those moods of spiritual passion which beget the irradiated and transfigured. Nature for which, since Wordsworth, poetry has continually striven to find expression, Browning's subtler feelings for Nature sprang from his profounder insight into love. Love was his way of approach, as it was eminently not Wordsworth's to the transfigured Nature which Wordsworth first disclosed. It is habitually lovers who have these visions—all that was mystical in Browning's mind attaching itself, in fact, in some way to his ideas of love. To the Two in the Campagna its primeval silence grows instinct with passion, and its peace with joy,—the joy of illimitable space and freedom, allwing yet mocking the finite heart that yearns. To the lovers of the Alpine gorge the old woods, heaped and dim,



that hung over their trothplighting mysteriously drew them together ; the moment that broke down the bar between soul and soul also breaking down as it were, the bar between man and nature :

“The forests had done it ; there they stood ;  
We caught for a moment the powers at play :  
They had mingled us so, for once and good,  
Their work was done, we might go or stay,  
They relapsed to their ancient mood.”

Such “moments” were in fact, for Browning as well as for his lovers, rare and fitful exceptions to the general nonchalance of Nature towards human affairs. The powers did good as they did evil, “at play” ; intervening with a kind of cynical or ironical detachment (like Jaques plighting Touchstone and Audrey) in an alien affair of hearts. A certain eerie playfulness is indeed a recurring trait in Browning’s highly individual feeling about Nature ; the uncanny playfulness of a wild creature of boundless might only half intelligible to man, which man contemplates with mingled joy, wonder, and fear. Joy, when brown old Earth wears her good gigantic smile, on an autumn morning ; wonder ; when he watches the ‘miracles wrought in play’ in the teeming life of the campagna ; fear, when, on a hot August midnight, Earth tosses stormily on her couch. And all these notes of feeling are struck, with an intensity and a boldness of invention which make it unique among his writings, in the great romantic legend of Childe Roland. What the Ancient Mariner is in the poetry of the mysterious terrors and splendours of the sea, that Childe Roland is in the poetry of bodeful horror, of haunted desolation, of waste and plague, ragged distortion, and rotting ugliness in landscape. The Childe, like the Mariner, advances through an atmosphere and scenery of steadily gathering menace ; the “starved ignoble Nature, “peerish and dejected” among her scrub of thistle and dock, grows malignant ; to the barren waste succeed the spiteful little river with its drenched despairing willows, the blood-trampled wire and wrecked torture-engine, the poisonous herbage and palsied oak, and finally the mountains, ignoble as the plain—“mere ugly heights and heaps,” ranged round the deadly den of the Dark Tower. But Browning’s horror-world differs from Coleridge’s in the pervading sense that the powers which control its issues are “at play”. The catastrophe is not the less tragic



for that ; but the heroic knight is not a culprit who has provoked the vengeance of his persuers, but a quarry course they follow with grim half suppressed laughter as he speeds into the trap. The hoary cripple cannot hide his malicious glee, the "stift blind horse" is a grotesque as he is woeful, the dreary day itself, as it sinks, shoots once grim red leer at the doomed knight as he sets forth ; in the penury and inertness of the wasted plain he sees "grimace" ; the mountains fight like bulls or doze like dotards ; and the Dark Tower itself is "round and squat," built of brown stone, a mere anticlimax to romance ; while round it lie the sports men assembled to see the end—

"The hills, like giants at hunting, lay  
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay."

Childe Roland, where the natural bent of his invention has full fling, abounds with grotesque traits which, instead of disturbing the romantic atmosphere, infuse, into it an element of strange, weird, and uncanny mirth, more unearthly than any solemnity ; the day shooting its grim red leer across the plain, the old worn-out horse with its red, gaunt, and colloped neck a-strain ; or, in Paracelsus, the "Cyclops-like" volcanoes "staring together with their eyes on flame," in whose "uncouth pride" God tastes a pleasure. Shelley had recoiled from the horrible idea of a host of these One-eyed monsters, Browning deliberately invokes it. But he can use grotesque effects to heighten tragedy as well as romance.

A poem of romance, but having all the customary features of temper, substance, and treatment inverted. In place of the glowing ideal and eager adventurous spirit of chivalry, there is the word, depressed constancy of the knight whose long years of errantry furnish him with none but derisive memories, and whose hope has dwindled almost to extinction. To replace the dreamy haze of beauty in Spenserian landscape, there is pictured with gruesome realistic detail the repulsive barrenness of the plain, the starved and penurious vegetation, the flat mountain heaps, the squat grotesque Dark Tower. For the sensuous enchantment of La Belle Dame sans Merci is substituted the evil magic which shifts and lights up for a moment these loathsome and menacing scenes. The very hills laugh out a great contemptuous peal as he confronts his task at last. There is no necessity to seek for and allegorical interpretation ; the poem speaks for itself.



**Childe.** This simply means a youth of rank ; it was afterwards applied to any knight. Compare Child Maurice and Child Waters. The finale is a modern device to distinguish this usage.

**Edgar's Song.** King Lear, III. IV. 193 Professor Child's English and Sottish Ballads gives fragments of a ballad Child Rowland and Burd Ellen ; but Browning's Poem is simply a fantastic expansion of the single line "Child Rowland to the dark tower came."

**2. That hoary cripple.** Compare Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale, lines 710-765 (Globe edition).

**3. Askance.** Sidewise. One of a number of words, askew, askoyne, etc., of which the etymology is still undetermined. Skeat suggests that it is due to Italian scansare, to go a-slope. See N. E. D.

**16. Neither pride nor hope rekindling, etc.** The mood of battered indifferent resignation is just as remote from the true temper of heroic adventure as the scenery is from the conventional landscapes of romance in Malory, Spenser Coleridge.

**24. finding failure in its scape.** The unaccustomed spring of joy was not due to the prospect of failure directly, but to the prospect of an end, which of course involved the possibility of failure.

**25. As when a sick man, etc.** It is possible that these two stanzas may have been suggested by the first verse of Donne's Valediction :

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,  
"Now his breath goes," and some say, "Nay."

**48. estray.** Properly a stray animal.

**68. the bents.** The stiff flower-stalks of grasses.

**72. Pashing.** Treading violently upon watery ground.

**76. One stiff blind horse.** One of several vivid memories Browning wove together in the poem. Mrs Orr (Hand book, p. 274) records them thus : "a tower which Mr. Browning once saw in the Carrara Mountains, a painting which caught his eye years later in Paris ; and the figure of a horse in the tapestry in his own drawing-room." Dr Furnivall describes it as as a red



horse with a glaring eye standing behind a dun one, on the right hand of a large tapestry."

**80. Colloped.** In Wanley's description of the torture of Ravallae, who murdered Henri IV of France, "Collops of flesh" were born away with hot pincers. Browning probably formed his participle from the word.

**85. I shut my eyes etc.** Compare the *Ancient Mariner*, Part IV. stanzas V, VI, VII.

**133. Cirque.** Any Circular arena.

**36 brewage.** A decoction. Through French *breurage*, a beverage.

**141. brake.** A rack' or frame of torture.

**143 Tophet's tool.** Some hellish instrument. Tophet was at first the name of part of the valley of Hiunom where the refuse of Jerusalem was burned, it later became synonymous with the place of the damned.

**147. So a fool finds mirth, etc.** Compare Caliban, lines 185-199.

**160. Appol yon's bosom-friend.** "So he went on and Apollyon met him. Now the monster was hideous to behold; he was clothed with scales like a fish, (and they were his pride) he had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was the mouth of a lion" (*Pilgrim's Progress*).

**203. slug-horn.** Skeat says of this word, "Ignorantly used by Chatterton and Browning to mean a sort of horn; but really Mid Sc *Slogorne*, a corruption of slogan, a war cry."

'A pretty Woman' is artfully slipped between a poem which inspires fear and awe, and another which conveys with increasing intensity a preternatural sense of fear and horror. 'Childe Roland came upon me as a kind of dream,' Browning said, and its starting-point was the line of the title, from King Lear. De Vane is convinced that much of the imagery derives from a book which Browning studied closely in his youth, Gerard de Lairese's *The Art of Painting*. The poem has been given a variety of interpretations; some have held that it is nothing but



a painting in the macabe. The auntless challenge at the end seems to have symbolical meaning. In presenting a hero who summons up courage to turn aside from 'the safe road' (l. 52), alone, against fearful odds, 'Childe Roland' has affinities with other poems by Browning. One recalls Caponsacchi in *The Ring and the Book*, and there are less important links with 'The Statue and the Bust,' and even with 'A Grammarian's Funeral'. This poem, however, goes much further, in expressing resolution undaunted by almost certain failure.

**143. Tophet.** Hell (originally a valley of burning outside Jerusalem).

**160. Apollyon.** A hideous monster in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The odds in this poem seem far more frightful than Christian's.

**161. Dragon-penned.** With dragon's feathers ; 'he had wings like a dragon' (Bunyan).

**203. Slug-horn.** Browning follows Chatterton in the use of this word. Actually 'slogan' meant a war-cry.

## 2. CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

The *gist* of the poem has been given in the *Special Introduction*.

The Caliban of the poem, as far as origin, physical characteristics, and intimacy with the sights and sounds of the island-go, is the Caliban of the tempest. But unlike the Shakespearean creation he possesses a faculty of ingenious though misdirected speculation, which is exercised here in elaborating conception of Setebos, the diety of his dam. On the assumption that this diety is altogether such a one as himself, he attributes to Setebos his own motives for action, namely listlessness, envy and sport, and his own qualities, callousness, cruelty towards weaker creatures, and wanton caprice in the use of power, each of which he illustrates from some episode or memory of his own life. Moreover just as Caliban goes in carven fear that Setebos may notice and menace him, so Setebos in Caliban's supposition is in dread of some remoter inscrutable power, vaguely named "the quiet." The poem therefore develops into a satire upon conjectures and beliefs about the Deity, framed upon man's reading of himself and his fellow-man. It is important to observe that Browning is



ridiculing only these absurdities of anthropomorphism; there are many aspects of the conception of the Divine by the human mind, upon which the satire is silent. As often elsewhere the poet presents a partial view, grotesquely distorted, for the sake of the emphasis of surprise.

**Thou thoughtest etc, *Psalm. i 21.***

1. **'Will sprawl.** I, Caliban, will sprawl. He speaks of himself for the most part in the third person, and generally omits the personal pronoun. This is puzzling till the appropriate subject is inserted. It has been suggested that the omission indicates the incomplete self realisation of the monster. His stunted development is insisted on in the pleasure, he derives from gross physical sensation (line 1-4).

7. **Pompion-plant.** In the sixteenth century the word was "pompon," which passed into the form "pompion," and in the nineteenth century to "pumpkin."

16 **His dam.** The foul witch Sycorax. *Tempest, 1.ii. 258.*

25. **'Thinketh, He dwelleth, etc.** Caliban conjectures that Setebos is uncomfortable in His dwelling "i' the cold o' the moon," but cannot by His nature exist elsewhere.

27. **But not the stars.** See line 138.

43. **so He.** That is, Setebos. Each section closing with these words defines some quality of the God by an analogy drawn either from Caliban's nature-lore, or from his own motives and actions.

44-97. Caliban supposes Setebos to have endowed the creatures of the universe with some few qualities superior to His own in order that they might provide the better sport for His capricious cruelty or favour.

51. **oakworts.** Oak-galls, excrescences on trees produced by insects.

66. **So better though they be.** Though they have these points of superiority.

72. **Maggots scamper through my brain.** Figuratively describing intoxication.

77. **Pinch my Caliban.** Force the clay into the shape and flight of a bird, which would then stand in relation to me, as I, Caliban now stand to Setebos.



79. **Hoopoe.** Formerly hoop; the upupa epops; a bird of gay plumage and high crest; a rare visitor to England at d.

83. **Grigs.** Crickets or grasshoppers. The N. E. a D. hesitates a little about the word; but Skeat points out that it occurs in five separate dialects.

90. **this might take or else Not take my fancy** <sup>ch</sup> <sup>ks.</sup> Emotions of pity and love have no existence for Caliban; <sup>n'so</sup> he cannot conceive them in his God. The incalculable whim <sup>ng</sup> of the moment is deemed to be the ground of action.

103 **Loving not, hating not, just choosing so** <sup>arr.</sup> A satirical perversion of the Calvinistic doctrines of election and reprobation "God has predestinated some to eternal life, while the rest of mankind are predestinated to condemnation and eternal death" (Calvin's Institutes). It is easy to pervert the doctrine <sup>es</sup> by imputing as motives for this choice the childish caprices of <sup>f line</sup> 104-107.

109-126. Caliban has a curious belief that Setebos is a being of less refinement than His creatures; it is partly based on his observation that nature is often of finer grain than mankind, and that inanimate creature are often capable, by man's agency, of feats beyond human skill. The conclusion in Caliban's mind is that the *Creator* must be envious of these too capable subjects; and if they should seem to boast, would stamp them under foot. This exercise of tyranny is the Deity's only consolation where His creatures seem to excel Him.

127-169. The staple pictorial stuff of the poem is a series of analogies of which this is the most striking example. Caliban looks up to prosper and realises that he cannot attain such happiness and serenity; therefore out of pure spite he creates a little world in imitation of Prospero's (its most remarkable denizen is a tortured and mangled sea-beast whom he calls Caliban) which he keeps in surely subjection. Similarly, he thinks, Setebos, in despair of the serenity of the supreme power of the Quiet (which "all it hath a mind to, doth"), creates this universe to torment and vex, out of chagrin at His subjection.

133. **Feels nor joy nor grief, Since both derive from weakness.** This is rather a lofty speculation for a Caliban, that consummate strength involves immunity from all emotion.

142. **The man-handed as a cuttle-fish.** He endows his God with fearsome physical attributes. It is the inference to characteristics so precisely primitive as this that that caused Hux-



ley to imply that poem is a scientific representation of religious ideas in primitive man. Professor Herford rightly points out, however, that "Primitive religion is inseparable from the primitive tribe, and Caliban the savage who has never known society as a conception as unhistorical as it was exquisitely adapted to the individualist ways of Browning's imagination."

156. **Oncelot.** A young lynx.

170-179. Caliban firmly sets aside the belief of his dam that the Quiet made all things well, but that Setebos had vexed them with defects. He holds that since the Quiet might have made them strong, but had on the contrary made them weak, there was proof that He must have done this of set malicious intention.

177-184. It is admitted that there may exist a liking for those who give benefits, but it is only on the ground of the benefits derived. The moment these can be acquired without liking all affection is at an end.

185-199. Caliban in the warm grateful summer finds delight in the exercise of his wit and strength, not for any useful end simply to satisfy an appetite for activity. The product is so unnecessary that he will some day kick it over. With equally little purpose he imagines the energies of Setebos to be employed.

200-240. The one quality in Setebos which Caliban never doubts is unrelenting spite; nature teems with evidences of it. It is possible to propitiate the God however; prosper had discovered the means. It is sport for Setebos to watch His creatures striving after this discovery. If they fail their fate is death; if they succeed they are still not to imagine that the discover ensures permanent safety. This would be to set bounds to His sovereign disposal of His creatures.

211. **a ball flame down late** A meteor.

216. **Please Him and hinder this ?** You suggest that I should learn how to please Him as Prospero does, and so turn aside His spite? Yes. But how?

241-262. Caliban sees no reason to anticipate change, unless perchance Setebos should make another Universe, pleasing Him better and and forget this; or should change His nature into that of the Quiet. Neither has he any belief in a future life in which there is to be no more suffering. He thinks Setebos has



crowded all the suffering He can into this life with the worst pain, death, to close it; there after nothing.

263-282. 'Would have Him misconceive. A rare stroke of irony. Knowing that he himself dislikes ostentatious happiness, he takes steps to deceive Setebos; reserves his dancing for dark nights; in the daylight moans and curses; hides in corners to laugh, hoping meanwhile, though without any too sanguine optimism, that Setebos may be annihilated by the Quiet, or possibly decay and die.

284. A certain O'er the world at once. With dramatic suddenness a thunderstorm breaks. To Caliban it is the signal that setebos has overheard his uguarded prattling. He grovels and seeks to propitiate the God's wrath a lie, "Loveth Setebos."

286. His raven. A new idea, that the birds are spies for Setebos.

### 3. MEETING AT NIGHT

&

### 4. PARTING AT MORNING

These two are companion pieces.

The former is a glimpse of moonlight and repose. The man returns to the seclusion of his sea-side home in the company of the one woman loved; the latter asserts the need of 'man' and their 'world' which is born again with the dawn.

"The dramatic lyric in two parts called Meeting at Night and Parting at Morning contains only sixteen lines and is a flawless masterpiece. Of the four dimensions of mathematics one only has nothing to do with poetry. The length of a poem is of no importance in estimating its value. I do not fully understand what is meant by saying that a poem is too long or too short. It depends entirely on the art with which the particular subject is treated. A short poem of no value is too long; a long poem of genius is not too long..... Browning's Night and Morning is not too short, because it contains in sixteen lines everything necessary. The Ring and the Book is not too long, because the twenty thousand and odd lines are all needed, to make the study of testimony absolutely complete. But whilst the mathematical dimension of length is not a factor in poetry, the dimensions of breadth and depth are of vital importance and the mysterious fourth dimension is the quality that determines



whether or not a poem is a work of genius. Poems of the highest imagination cannot be measured at all except in the fourth dimension, the first part of Browning's lyric noted for its shortness its breadth and its depth; the second part possesses these qualities even more notably and also takes the reader's thought into a world entirely outside the limits of time and space..... The dramatic contrast in this poem is between the man's feeling at night and his mood in the morning. Both parts of the lyric, therefore, come from the man's heart. It is absurd to suppose, as many critics seem to think, that the second part is uttered by the woman. Such a mistake could never have arisen, if it had not for the 'word' him in the penultimate line, which does not of course, refer to the man but to the sun. To have the woman repeat in her heart these lines not only destroys the true philosophy of life set forth in the lyric but the lost reflection.

And the need of a world of men for me would seem to make her taste rather catholic for an ideal sweetheart. The real meaning of the poem is simply this : The passionate intensity of love cannot be exaggerated; in the night's meeting all other thoughts, duties and pleasures are as though they were not; but with the day comes the imperious call of life and even if the woman could be content to live for ever with honestly, with fervour and sincerity, but he simply must go out into the world where men are, and take his share of the excitement and the struggle; he would soon be absolutely loves. Those novels that represent a man as having no interest in life but love are false to human nature. In this poem, Browning represents facts as they are; it is not simply that the man wants to go out and live among other men, it is a natural law that he must, as truly a natural law as gravitation.

And straight was a path of gold for him,  
And the need of a world of men for me.

Just as the sun must take his prescribed course through the sky, so must I run my circle of duties in the world of men. It is not a moral call of duty; it is the unfortunate pull of necessity. (Phelps).

**Gist.** In the morning the man must go out into the world to do his duty.

**Summary.** "Returning dayling reveals the world; the sun begins his golden path across the sky; the man turns to his daily



course also, but with the consciousness of a need in his heart that the pageant of external nature will not satisfy the need of human society" (Fowler). (Or rather; the man must run his circle of duties in the world of men, just as the sun must take his prescribed course through the sky.)

**Substance.** In the morning, just as the sun must take his prescribed course through the sky, so the man must run his appointed circle of duties in the world of men.

**Notes.** **Round the cape etc.** "returning day-light reveals the world." The nature picture of the dawn is absolutely perfect.

**Round the cape of a sudden came the sea.** He does not say that finally the cape became visible, but that the sea suddenly came round the cape. Any one who has stood on the oceanshore before dawn and gazed along the indented coast in the grey light, has observed the precise effect mentioned in these words. At first one sees only the blur of land where the cape is, and nothing beyond it; suddenly the light increase, and the sea actually appears to come around the point." **Rim**—edge, circumference. **Straight was the path of gold for him**—the sun began his golden path across the sky; **Path of gold**—glowing pathway across the sky. **For him**—for the sun.

**The need of a world of men for me**—I must run my circle of duties in the world of men; I must go out into the world to do my duty; I need the world of men; it is a necessity laid upon me for work. It is just possible that we could interpret 'need', with an inversion; "the world of men needs me and I must go to do my share." But it is certainly better to understand the line in the first sense viz., that I need the world of men.

**Meeting at Night**—The whole poem is a *very fine pen-picture of the calm sea*, the dark coast-line, the arrival of the husband worn but by the day's toil at his home at night by plying his small craft, the wide stretch of the sea-beach, his gentle tap at the window-pane to rouse his wife, the quick lighting of the match of the wife and the emotional glow of the happy couple, imparadised in each other's arms. **Grey sea**—Serene sea, appearing unruffled and grey. **And the along black land**—the coast line of the sea, which the vessel of the man reaches. (*Note the wonderful reticence in the description.* The omission of a principal very adds to realism of the picture). **The startled little waves the**



waves, usually, unruffled, are startled, as it were, by the sudden plying of a boat. In fiery ringlets—in blazing wavelets on account of the play of moonlight. From their sleep from their serene composure. As I gain.....prow—As I enter the creek or bay by pushing my vessel (the reference is to the return of the husband). And quench.....sand—and lessen the speed of my craft because of its contract with the watery sand, where further progress is impossible. Then a mile.....beach Then I have to walk on foot a mile of pleasant sea-beach, smelling the briny water of the sea, which it has absorbed during the whole day. A tap at the pane—I give a gentle tap at the window pane in order to draw the attention of my wife within the house. The quick sharp scratch—this describes in the briefest possible manner the scratching of a match-stick, followed immediately by a sudden blue glow of light, And a voiceless loud etc.—and then I am glad to hear my wife's voiceless loud through its hopes and fears, than the two hearts of ours, fluttering in a thrill of joy is so great at this happy union after an absence for the whole day that the wife's voice naturally becomes less loud than heavy beating of our two hearts, now knit together in close embrace.

*Parting at Morning.* The dawn came, suddenly the sea rose round the solitary cape. The sun peeped from behind the edge of the mountain. The man thought that just as the sun must take his prescribed course through the sky, so must he run his circle of duties in the world of men.

**Round .....sea**—At first the man saw only the blur of I and where the cape was, and nothing beyond it; suddenly the light increased, and the sea actually appeared to come around the point, a path of gold—a golden career. Cf. "the sun, Which" is a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a race." Psalm. xix 4-5.

## 5. A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

The *Gist* of the poem has been given in the *Special Introduction*.

It is only masculine lover whom Browning allows thus to get the better of unreturned love. His women have no such remedia amoris; their heart's blood will not transmute into the ichor of poetry. It is women alone who ever utter the pognancy of rejected love; in them it is tragic, unreflecting,



unconsolable, and merciless ; while something of his own elastic buoyancy of intellect, his supple optimism, analytic, dissipation is very apparent in the group of lyrics which deal with the less complete divisions of love. An almost oppressive intensity of womanhood pulses in *A Woman's Last Word*, *In a Year*, and *Any Wife to to Any Husband* : the first, with its depth of self-abasement and its cloying litting melody, tremble, exquisite as it is, on the verge of the "sentimental."

## 6. MISCONCEPTIONS

The *Gist* of the poem has been given before.

From the second volume of *Men and Women* (1855).

10. **The true bosom** : that of the man she gave her love to.

11. **dalmatic** : a wide sleeved, long loose vestment with slit side, worn by ecclesiastics on certain occasions and kings at their coronations.

## 7. LAMENT FOR VANISHED BEAUTY

The Summary of the poem has been given in the *Special Introduction* before.

St. i. *Substance*. Paracelsus imagines himself making a pyre of aromatic spices—cassia, sandal, landanum, aloewood smeared with spikenard.

**Notes.** **Heap**. gather with a view to making a pyre. **Cassia**—a fragrant shrub or plant and inferior kind to cinnamon. **Sandal-buds**—the sandal is a low tree and has a great fragrance. **Stripes of Labdanum**—Labdanum or Ladanum is a resinous exudation from certain plants growing in the mediterranean region. **Aloe-balls**—the aloewood of the bible containing a dark fragrant resinous substance. **Smeared**—besmeared. **Nard**—spikenard, a very fragrant oil. Indian-used in the general sense of 'Easter' a native of the tropics. The East Indies may possibly be meant. Women of the East smear their hair with fragrant oil. **Baslam**—Fragrant resinous exudation from certain trees. **Mountain pedestals**—base of the hills. **Tired winds are fain spent etc.**—the winds are represented as galdly treasuring up the fragrance which they have acquired by blowing over the island, being tired and exhausted with long wanderings over the vast and boisterous sea. The idea is that the fragrant gums exude



from tress on the sea side where they are stirred by lazy odorous winds. Tired with blowing over the sea. **Fain**—gladly. **Spent**—exhausted. **Treasure**—store up. **Island gain**—the fragrance which they have gained or acquired by blowing over the island.

**St. 2. Substance.** He is to disseminate the faint odour from the aromatic substances used to embalm an Egyptian mummy.

**Notes.** **Strew**—Scatter. **Faint sweetness**—faint odour. **From some old Egyptian etc.**—from the fragrant spices used to embalm some Egyptian mummy. **Shroud**—winding sheet. **Breaks to dust etc.**—mummies and things embalmed to fare like this, crumble away to dust under the touch. **Shredded perfumes etc.** the construction is : “strew shredded perfume, like a cloud etc.” The fragrant pieces of tapestry as they drop on the floor are referred to. **Shredded perfume**—the perfumed or fragrant shreds or pieces of pieces of tapestry. **Clouds**—the tapestry crumbles away to dust, which rises up like a cloud. **Closet long to quite vowed**—small room which had for many years been the abode of quietness ; room which none had entered for many years. Keats speaks of the urn as “the unravished brine of quietness”, in his *Ode to the Grecian Urn*. **Arras**—tapestry so called being first manufacture in the town of Arras. **With moth and dropping etc.**—the walls of the closet were hung with tapestry which was moth-eaten and was dropping to pieces. **Mouldering**—crumbling away to dust. **Lute**—Mr. Fowler refers the reader to Sir Edmund Gosse’s sonnet, *On a lute found in a Sacro-phagus*:

“This lute has outsung Egypt ; all the lives  
Of violent passion, and the vast calm art  
That lasts in granite only, all lie dead ;  
This little bird of song alone survives,  
As fresh as when its fluting smote the heart,  
Last time the brown slave wore it garlanded.”

**As when a queen etc.**—When as a queen, now long dead, she was young.

## 8. DE GUSTIBUS

The *Central thought* and *Summary* of the poem have been already given.



**St. 1. Substance :** An Italian speaks thus to his English friend :—After your death your ghost will be found haunting the beautiful English scenes you love, the cornfield with poppies, the Hazel bush, where lovers meet in moonlit night in spring. Do not disturb them then by your presence.

**Your ghost etc.**—The reference is to a supposed friends who is presumably an Englishman. **You lover of trees**—i. e., a lover of nature who has a special fondness for green and flowery trees or of landscapes where they grow. **If our loves remain**—i. e., if our loves survive beyond death. This is an interesting question ; and here. Browning does not put any definite answer in the mouth of the speaker. But Browning was vitally interested in the idea of immortality. He wrote not a few poems expounding his views on the subject. Here, however, there is no definite answer but a wish. **Loves**—attachments to various objects of delight. **English lane**—a lane in some part of England. **A flutter with poppies**—a ‘poppy’ is a plant having large showy flowers, from one species of which opium is obtained. The word ‘a flutter’ is very expressive. It brings home to us the agitation and confusion which profuse poppy-blooms would cause to the ‘cornfield-side’ and at once draw the attention of the passer-by.

**Expl. 1-4. Your ghost will walk etc.** The idea is this ; there is a belief that the Ghosts of the departed haunt the scenes they loved best in life. Hence the English friend of the speaker who is such a lover of the spring scenes of England would when dead, come back and haunt the scenes he now loves so ardently. Op. Lamb’s “Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood.” (The old Familiar Faces). **Expl. Hark these two etc.**—The lines 5-12 introduce another idea and its corresponding picture. A man travelling in a lane by hazel coppice in a moonlit night my chance upon a whispering pair of lovers. He need not disturb them. After all, they will pass away like the transient beauties of the spring, just as the bean-flowers and the black bird and May and June would pass away. A ‘coppice’ is a bush of small growth for periodical cutting.

**If the good fates please**—if the fates do not want to make them unhappy, but ungrudgingly allow them their happiness. **The happier they**—on account of their love, they are happier than other mortals. **Draw yourself up from the light of the moon** that is to say, do not leave your place of shelter and go into the



open space of moonlight, for then lovers will see you and be disturbed at your presence. **And let them pass as they will too soon**—this idea has been treated widely and finely by a host of Jacobean and Caroline poets. Some of Herrick's lyrics may be referred to. **Bean-flowers' boon**—The boon or gift of bean-flowers which spring has bestowed on the meadows. *May and June - months of spring.*

**St. 2. Substance :** As for myself I love Italy the best of lands, whether my home there be a castle in the appenines among its "wind-grieved" heights ; or some old house on its southern shore on the edge of an opaque blue sea amidst drought and stillness, where, occasionally, some news of the political turmoil would reach.

**Precipice-encurled**—curled around by precipices or steep cliffs. **A Gash**—a deep, open wound. Here it refers to some-portion of the Appenies which looks like a deep open cut, due to the action of the glaciers or earthquake. **Wind-grieved**—troubled by stormy winds. **Appenine**—or the Appenines, a chain of mountains running, a chain of mountains running from the north to the south of Italy. **Old fellow of mine**—i. e. my dear friend. **If I get my head etc.**—If I have a re-birth altofiether, if I live beyond grave with all my ideas and cherished desires ('my head') and can come back to Italy. **Loose my spirit's bands** until the cords of the life hereafter which will enchain my spirit. **The land of lands**—the best land, meaning Italy. **The backed Cicala**—Cicala is a genus of plants, cultivated as a pot—herb with stalk, each bearing a flower, radiating from one centre. 'baked' means 'dried up ! **Drouth**—want of rain or water. **Cypress** an evergreen tree whose branches used to be carried at funerals. Hence it suggests loneliness and desolation carried at funerals. Hence it suggests loneliness and desolation. **Red r sted**—coated with red rust. **Roughiron-spiked**—with spikes like tough iron. The tree is very old and gaunt. **Ripe fruit O'er crusted**—with ripe fruits covered with a hard crust, with no sap whatsoever. **Sentinel**—a soldier at point with the duty of watching for the approach of any enemy. N. B. The entire description conveys to us the aridity and desolateness of the summer of the south of Italy. **Opaque-dark**—not transparent. **Blue braedth of sea etc.**—blue sea stretching away to the horizon without any speak of land any here. **Frescoed wall**—the touch is distincti-



vely Italian. In the old Italian houses we may expect to find frescoed walls with fragments crumbling with age. A fresco are kind of painting executed with colours, covered with damp freshly-laid plaster. **Blisters**—here it means some injury to the crust of the fresco due to its worn-out state by scorpions. **Spraws**—stretches the body carelessly. It suggests the careless freedom with which the scorpion lies in the cracks in the wall. **A gril bare-footed etc.**—A swiftly moving one-act play is enacted. Browning's master over such sudden situations is astonishing. **The king**—the reference is to the then king of Italy, who was an Austrian monarch belonging to the Bourbon dynasty. Was shot of by some Italian revolutionary, who was, evidently a follower of Garibaldi, who wanted to free Italy from the sway of the Austrians. The reference is to the Italian war of Independence in the forties of the 19th century. **Touched in the liver wing**—'living-wing' is the right wing of a fowl etc., which when dressed for cooking, has liver tucked under it : hence jocularly, the right arm. The king was wounded in the right arm, not seriously, the shot just grazed his right arm.

**His Bourbon arm**—he was a man Bourbon dynasty, the old French Royal dynasty which rules in France and Austria-Hungary for many years. **In a sling**—as his arm was wounded by the shot. **She hopes etc.**—as she is a patriot. **Felons**—the wicked persons. It is spoken in jest. As a matter of fact, the girl did not really consider the Italian terrorists as felons. **Queen Mary's saying etc.** Queen Mary ruled in England before Elizabeth. She lost Calais in 1558 ; and in 1559, she died. The shock of this loss was too much to bear. It is said that when the news reached her she exclaimed, 'If you open my heart after my death you will find the word Calais' written there. 'The speaker here wants to say the same thing with regard to Italy. So shall ever be i.e. even beyond the grave. Here a conviction of the immortality of the soul is expressed.

## 9. THE FLOWER'S NAME

The Substance of the poem has been given before.

*St. 1.* The lover describes the garden in which he wandered about along with his ladylove arm in arm—locked in each other's arms. **Such a short while since**—only a few minutes ago. (All the impressions of the lady are yet so vivid that the very atmosphere of the garden breathes her presence.)



The readers of the poem are carried away by the rapturous melody of the lover. Nowhere has the poet dropped the slightest hint about his ladylove's beauty, but still from the subsidiary touches given here and there, they can easily imagine that she was a monument of beauty. Our impressions are shifted from the lovely flowers described to the beautiful young girl who so lovingly admired them. In this poem the most striking thing is the creation of a romantic atmosphere in which the beauty of flowers is allied with, nay, stands inferior to, the girl.) **Hark**—listen. **Wicket**—a small door within a gate. **Hinders the hinges**—note the intentional staccato in which sound echoes sense. **Makes them wince**—even the hinges are made to wince! **Ere she turned**—before she departed. **As back, etc.**—when the wicket swung back with that grating murmur, because the hinges were moss-covered. **For she laid, etc.**—The girl was so tender-hearted that when the lover unguardedly trod upon a snail, she carefully laid among the leaves.

**St. II. Gravel-walk**—Pathway made of coarse sand and small pounded stones. **Her robe's edge**—the hem of her garment. **Brushed**—touched, **Box**—a kind of small evergreen shrub, especially onewith small dark leathery leaves, much used in garden borders. **And here etc.**—Note the local touch at every stage in the description. In the course of her agreeable talk with me she halted for a time at this very spot to point me a moth on milk-white phlox flower. **Ranged in valiant row**—arranged in a triumphant row. **I will never.....by!**—The lover cannot persuade himself to believe that his ladylove ignored the roses, which are an emblems of love. **But yonder, etc.**—But look up there where rock-plants grow. (The subject is continued in the next stanza.)

**St. III.** In this stanza is described a curious foreign flower with a "soft meandering Spanish name.." The ladylove stopped silently near this flower and stooped over it in doubt as if to settle the claim of its superiority to other flowers. Then she proudly gave out its Spanish name with an emphasis that I might not mispronounce it. **It was a fine name indeed**—it might mean love or praise, with the determination to learn Spanish as quickly as possible only for the sake of that fine rock-flower, if any for anything else. **Meandering circuitous, zig-zag. What name! etc.**—These two lines are a good example of Brownings' sense of beauty and pure poetic imagination.



St IV. The lover now says that if possible, he will persuade the girl to come once again to the garden and give an equally sweet and rhythmic name to the roses. But he is anxious to meet the girl, who lingers elsewhere in the garden clinging to the ground like sunshine and searching after a bud with her soft white fingers.

One of these days—i.e., as soon as possible. To fix.....spell—give you a soft name which will exactly now this is spoken to the roses. Lingers—waits. Like sunshine over the ground—this touch gives us some idea of the radiating beauty of the girl. Her soft white fingers—another fine touch describing the sweet beauty of the girl. After the bud—young as the girl was, she was naturally attracted to the bud.

St. V. Flower, You Spaniard—You rock-flower with a Spanish name. The lover calls upon the rock-flower not to grow and the bud not to blossom into full flower. If they remain as they are, they will retain the imprint of her fingers. 'Tis that you blow not—see that you do not blossom into full flower. Mind—see that. The shut pink, etc.—shut pink-complexioned mouth of the bud may never open. Any growth on the part of the bud will sap the lover's romantic dream of his lady : hence he wants its suspended growth. Pouts—opens the petals. Her fingers wrestle—the girl's fingers contend with it. Twinkling.. between—sparkling between the bold leaves (the leaves are bold because they dare clasp her fingers like a lover). Till round they etc.—Note the fine dactylic rhythm in the whole poem, and still Browning is called prosaic and unmusical !

St. VI. Without the girl, the lover finds no beauties anywhere; and if he pursues her, all beauties flee thither in the passion of his pursuit. Is there no method, etc.—Is there no way to speak to her in Spanish that the beauty of June is enhanced hundredfold because she breathed it in my company ? (This shows that in the fancy of a deeply enamoured lover no physical object has any other beauty independent of the beauty of his sweet-heart. Nature is only beautiful in so far she imparts her beauty to it) Show me the least of her traces—the slightest of her finger-mark. Treasure.....foot—full-cherish on your person the softest foot-fall of my beloved. You may flout, etc.—because she passed you by for the sake of the rock-plant with its soft mendering Spanish name. Roses, etc.—At last the bewildered lover says that roses have no appeal for him without his beloved.



## 10. RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

The Substance and Paraphrase of the poem have been given earlier.

**Tripoli**—a province of Turkey in North Africa with its capital Tripoli, situated on a spit of rocky land jutting into the Mediterranean, surrounded by high walls and Moorish in appearance.

**St. I.** (Rudel's description of a snow-capped mountain, always first visited and last left by the sun. Underneath this solemn mountain there bloomed a sunflower, which always changed its position to turn its face to the sun with its changing career across the sky.)

**The gracious Sun**—the generous sun, diffusing its rays every where. **Perceives**—touches. Owing to the great height of the mountain the rays of the sun are perceived earliest on its top and they linger there most as well. **When he . . . world**—when the sun sets. **Vainly favoured**—Rudel says that this partiality of the sun shown to the mountain is of no avail, because the latter remains sullen and unmoved, perennially caped with snow as it is. (Note how the description is minute and picturesque) **Repays**—requits. **The day long . . . gaze**—the fixed glow of the sun remaining on the top of the mountain through the livelong day. Each word in the phrase large calm front of snow is accented, suggesting a vast heap of snow.

**A flower I know**—Rudel compares himself with the sunflower. The sunflower blooming in a solitary and dark corner underneath the mountain constantly tries to keep its look fixed on the sun. In its daily progress through the sky, the sun changes its position: so does the sunflower. In this perpetual attempt the sunflower foolishly mimicks the sun and is shorn of its tender loveliness as a flower. So is Rudel shorn of all his spirits, because he has kept his gaze constantly fixed on the East, the far off region where his beloved Lady of Tripoli lives. The sun is the Lady, the sunflower is Rudel, the French singer, (In the third stanza this imagery has been described as 'picture',

**He cannot have perceived**—The single-hearted devotion of the sunflower is not noticed by the sun. **That changes ever at his approach**—the flower constantly changes its position at the advance of the sun in order to look it full in the face. **Last endeavour--vain attempt. To live his life**—to live the life of the sun. **Parted**—i.e., been shorn off. **One by one**—to be construed with *graces*, which fall



off one by one. **Graces**—beauties. For the grace..... sun—in the foolish attempt of acquiring the beauties of a mimic sun. **Mimic**—imitation; a sun in miniature. with rays like.. face—this exactly describes the sunflower. **Florets**—petals which shoot out like the rays of the sun, **Disk-like face**—the sunflower is round in appearance like the disc of the sun. Nobly call by many a name—i.e. give many a noble name. **Large**..... snow—note the splendid effect of the repetition of this phrase. **Like a triumphal target**—like a target of triumph; like a protecting barrier. **Reared**—raised **Vei**—compete with each other. **Each to**..... own account—each name praises one feature of the mountain or another. **sportively**—playfully, in jest; because the flower mimics the sun.

St. II. (Rudel now prays to the sun, or more properly, to the Lady of Tripoli herself to cast a beneficent look upon him).

**Angel of the East**—the sun and the Lady of Tripoli. **Gold look benignant and condescending look.** Across the waters—beyond the blue Mediterranean. This twilight nook—this dark corner, where the sunflower blooms in your expectation. The far sad, etc This repetition adds a pathetic touch to the whole apostrophe.

St. III. (Rudel says that he has chosen sunflower as his badge.)

**Dear Pilgrim**—This spoken to any casual voyager to Tripoli. **Art thou**..... indeed? Are you actually bound for the east? **Saying** ..... proceed—always proclaiming in the course of your onward voyage. **French Rudel**—Rudel, a Frenchman. **Choose for my device**—accept as my badge. **Outspread**..... idol—stretched out like a sacrifice before the deity. **inexpert**—inefficient. **Hurried fingers, etc.**—here Rudel compares the entire imagery to some finely woven tapestry work, in which women alone are efficient. A man as he is, it cannot be expected that his work of embroidery (namely, this fanciful imagery) will picture—i.e. the imagery of sunflower and the sun. **Tis a woman's skill indeed**—this is really an art which properly belongs to women, who are an adept hand at delicate tapestry-work. **But nothing etc.**—but undeterred by any thing, I have finished my imagery, it may be good or bad, **Feed on**—like.

**Therefore Bask**..... broad—bees are attracted to flowers and on them they lie as on broad plank of the sunflower itself does not go in for them, because it has its look steadfastly fixed on the idol of its heart, the sun. Similarly, Rudel's songs may be very



much liked by men, but what of that? Rudel's is perpetually turned to one object of his supreme yearning, the East, where the Lady of Tripoli resides. Concern—*anxiety*. For these I. E. for these bees. Applaud—*praise*. He not looking here—Rudel not caring a brass fathing for popular praise. The east—the repetition is very fine and suggestive.

## II. A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

The Summary of the poem has been given before.

Browning may have had in mind the popular toccata he heard sung in Venice on his first visit in 1838. Galuppi (1706-85) was a celebrated composer, who was born near Venice. He wrote a large number of operas. A Toccata is literally a 'touch-piece' to demonstrate a performer's technique. Its movement is rapid and flowing, suggestive of improvisation. Browning, who is known to have loved playing Galuppi toccatas on the organ, suggests the movement and tone of the music to recall the pomps and vanities of Venice.

l. 6. St Mark's is the cathedral. To symbolize Venice's dependence on the sea for its power, it was the annual custom on Ascension Day for the ruler of Venice to be rowed out in state and to drop a ring into the sea.

l. 8. Shylock's bridge—The Rialto.

ll. 19-21. The interval between two notes is counted inclusively, e. g. E is the third to C. For 'lesser third' see p. 112. A 'sixth diminished' is an academic term, since it is really a perfect fifth. A 'suspension' is the holding over of a note in a chord to the next chord. The resulting dissonance is resolved ('solution') by the substitution of a note in harmony. The dissonance and its solution here suggest decay and death.

l. 24. Dominant: The fifth note of the scale.

St. I. Paraphrase—O Baldarssaro Galuppi, now I understand how very melancholy your toccata is, I cannot misunderstand the purport of your song! If I did, it would only prove my deafness and blindness. But though I understand the burden of your music, it is with a great heaviness of spirits.

Toccata—or touch-piece (an Italian musical term) a very flowing movement, in notes of equal length, in which Galuppi introduced freely chords and other important improvisations.



(The *toccata* resembles much our Indian *Kheyal* tyde of music, introduced by Sultan Husain Sharqu, which was much improved upon during the regime of Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow. Its magnificent pathos and thrilling realism are striking features) **Galuppi**—see biographical note given above. This very said to find—the burden of your music, which I cannot miss, is very said and pathetic, producing a deep melancholy. **Can hardly misconceive you**—cannot fail to realise the burden of your pathetic music. **It would etc.**—if I misconceive the purport of your music, that will prove that I am physically deficient. **Take your meaning**—understand the meaning of your song.

**St. II. Paraphrase**—Here you come with one of your old toccatas, full of noble grandeur. You describe in your song how people lived once in Venice, where rich merchants lived like a prince. You ask in a pathetic strain, where is that old grandeur of the great cathedral of St. Mark and where are those far-famed Doges, who used to perform in the middle ages, the annual ring-dropping ceremony with such a great eclat ?

**Old music**—i. e. Toccata, **Here's all the brings**—it does one's heart good to listen to your sweet melodies. **What**—The poet expresses wonder at the immense wealth of the ancient Venetians as Galuppi recapitulates in his songs. **They lived..... kings**—at one time the people of Venice were so rich that they lived in princely style. There were big merchants, who were like so many princes. **Where St. Mark is etc.**—Cf. the Sanskrit proverb :

Where is that Mothurapuri of Jadupati (Sri Krishna) gone, and where is that empire of Kosala of Raghupati (Sri Ram chandra)? Compare also the last two lines of Wordsworth's famous sonnet, entitled *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*:

“Men are we, and must grieve whenever the shade  
Of that which once was great, is passed away”

**St. Mark's**—or Basilica of St. Mark is the name of a famous Venetian cathedral, founded in 830 to receive the relics of the evangelist brought from Alexandria. It is the most famous Byzantine structure of Western Europe. Externally and internally, and despite regrettable restorations St. Mark's is most superb piece of architectural colouring in the world. **Where the Dogs etc.**—i.e. where are the Doges. The Kings of Venice used to be called Doges or Dukes. In order to show their supremacy over the sea (the Medi-



terrannean) the Doges used to drop annually a ring into it. This gala ceremony used to be called in Italian *Sposalizio del mare* (marriage with the sea).

**St. III Paraphrase**—The topography of Venice is peculiar. The town is short through with arteries of canals, which serve the purpose of streets, on which people fly on gondolas. Your description of the sea and the arched bridge over it, known as Shylock's bridge with houses constructed on it, and of the festive merry-making of the gay Venetians is very vividly reproduced before my mind's eye. Though I was never out of England your graphic song visualised everything for me.

**Note**—Note the very vivid and sudden turns of expression used throughout the poem. This is in the manner of Browning. There is always a dramatic change and form. The reference is to the subject matter of Galuppi's *toccata*, which called up before the poet's mind's eye the entire topography of the city of Venice so vividly that, as he points out, without ever being in Venice, he visualises every detail.

**The sea's the street there**—Venice is a seaport, capital of the province Venice in Italy, situated in the Lagune (lagoons) in a bay of the Adriatic Sea, on 117 small islands. The islands are separated by 150 canals and connected by 378 bridges. The communication is mostly by water, the grand Canal being the principal thoroughfare, which runs in the form of the letter S. through the centre of the city, from the railway station to Santa Maria del Salute. The means of communication is the world-famed gondolas. They are light flat-bottomed boats with cabins amidships and high points at each end worked by one oar at stern (something like the Kashmiri *Shikaras*, which ply on the beautiful Jhelum.)

**'Tis arched by**—these arches (for bridges) are pretty numerous. What you call the dots before after this sentence indicate that the writer tries to recall the name of one of the arches. One is Shylock's bridge—it is said that Shylock's house was in the old market place by the Rialto Bridge. (Shylock the Jew is a world-famous character in Shakespeare's romantic comedy, *The Merchant of Venice*) Where they kept the carnivals—where they carried on their gay revelry. I was never out, passed the best years of his life in Florence and etc.—in the very vivid and realistic song of Galuppi, everything of Venice is masterfully reproduced.



**St. IV. Paraphrase.**—You describe in your song how young Venetians of both sexes used to enjoy life when the sea was warm in summer; how masks; which retained their beat and sensation till the following mid-day, after which they again went in for fresh adventures for the morrow.

**N. B.** This and the next two stanzas described the gay and dissolute life of the Venetians in the middle ages. They were staunch pleasure-seekers and paid no attention to the improvement of their soul. They freely indulged in wine and the love of women while they plunged themselves headlong clavicord and sang his fine toccatas, but without producing any result on the minds of his pleasure mad audience.

**Young people**—Young Venetians of both sexes. **Take their pleasure**—indulge in pleasure-seeking. **When the sea was warm in May-ice.**—when it was brisk summer. **Balls and masks etc.**—Note how the gay Venetians used to carry on their merry-making night after night, which retained a heat of sensation throughout the day. (Browning describes the same decay and fall of greatness in a different context in his *Love among the Ruins*, where he describes the ruin of the great Romans:—

“In one fear they sent a million fighters forth  
                                 South and North,  
 And they built their gods a brazen pillar high  
                                 As the sky,  
 Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force  
                                 Gold, of course.  
 Oh heart ! Oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!  
                                 Earth’s returns  
 For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin !  
                                 Shut them in,  
 With their triumphs and their glories and the rest !  
                                 Love is best”

**Balls**—i.e. ball dancing. **Masks**—i.e., masked ball at which masks or coverings are worn on the face. **Burning**—producing a heat of sensation. **Made up**—devised. **French adventures**—New kinds of pleasure. **For the morrow**—for the next day. **Do you say**—This is spoken to Galuppi, with reference to his toccata on the glories of the Venetian republic.



**St. V. Paraphrase**—Do you describe in your song a charming lady with round cheeks and red lips, with a gay small face on her neck, like a bellflower blooming on its bed and a beautifully round heaving breast, fit for the lover to lay his head on ?

**N. B.** In a few short strokes the poet has given us the picture of a beautiful young Venetian girl. Her cheeks were full and her lips were crimson. Her face was bright and small like a bell flower blooming on a flower-bed. She had a full the small face, the small indicates feminine beauty. **Buoyant**—sprightly. **Bellflower**—a small kind of flower of the germs of *companula*. **The breast's superb abundance**—the reference is to the fullness and roundness of the youthful heaving bosom. **Base**—rest.

**St. VI. Paraphrase**—Was it the case—and if so, it was quite graceful of those young Venetians—that they would at times break off their talk, that the woman would express her love and the lover would pledge fidelity to her, while you sat and played stately notes at the clavichord?

(And it was graceful of them)—and their love-making was really a fine thing. **Break talk off**—discontinue suddenly their conversation. **She**—the sweetheart. **Bite her masks velvet**—i.e. bashfully confess that she heartily loved the young man. **He**—the young lover. **To finger on his sword**—to place the finger on the sword indicates fidelity. **Stately**—in a grand and noble style. **Clavichord**—a fifteenth century string-instrument, the predecessor of the modern piano.

**Sts. VII—IX. Paraphrase**—What was it that took place all on a sudden? You played on your sad lesser thirds and then mournfully continued the diminished sixths. Did these notes convey to the lover some message? Did your suspensions and solutions and solutions declare the inexorable nature of death? And did your commiserating sevenths reply, 'No, life might last yet! We can only try!'

The lover asked you, 'were you happy', and your reply was in the affirmative, 'And are you still happy?' he asked again. You replied, 'Yes, but what is the case with yourself?' He replied, 'Well, let me enjoy the girl's kisses. 'You became diffident at this, and again asked, 'Was I responsible to stop your kisses, when a million of them seemed so insufficient with you?'

Then the lover again became happy and Galuppi's eighth note answered to the fifth. I am sure, the gay lover praised you for



this ! He must have said, 'Bravo, Galuppi ! that is music, indeed ! You are an adept hand to produce—equally a grave and gay atmosphere ! If you continue singing in that vein, we can always discontinue talking.'

N. B. The following technical words are used in these stanzas ; lesser thirds, sixth, suspension, solutions, servants dominant and octave, indicating that artist rose, step by step, in the pitch of music producing a variety of feelings in the minds of the listeners, gradually rising from a deep melancholy to a gay light-hearted note. The lesser thirds are minor thirds. Diminished sixths (seven semitones), very rarely used by the musician, suggest a feeling of rest and satisfaction. Suspensions are notes which are held over from one chord into another ; they are dissonant in their character and are always followed by a concord, in other words a solution. A commiserating seventh, another important variety of dissonance, is also called a minor seventh. The dominant chord in music is the chord written on the fifth degree of the scale. This dominant must be answered in the tonic an octave above the first presentation of the theme, and so an octave struck the answer ! (From an article in Poet Lore, October, 1890).

The lesser thirds and the diminished sixths played a mournful note. Then there was a pause and the pitch rose again. Accordingly, a variation of mood was produced in the mind of the lover and there was at last triumphant mood. The love thought that he might freely drink the cup of life to the dregs, not knowing that the enjoyment of physical pleasures love would contribute their spiritual well being. Galuppi's purpose was thus missed by the listener, who loudly applauded his musical powers.

Commiserating—pitying. Life might last—but there is a chance that we may live longer, and till the fire of life. In the eighth stanza, a conversation follows between a Venetian lover and Galuppi, the musician. Then, more kisses !—then let me enjoy the sweet kisses of my beloved all the more. Did I stop them, etc.—Galuppi feels abashed at the thought that perhaps he was responsible for stopping the merry making of this lover. So he makes a query of diffidence,—'was it myself who stopped your kisses, when a million of them seemed so inadequate ?'



**The dominant's persistence**—"the inexorable solution comes in after the dominant's persistence. Although life seemed possible with the commiserating sevenths, the tonic, a resistless face strikes the answer which the frivolous people of Venice failed to perceive, and went on with their kissing. The notion of the tonic key as a relentless fate seems to suit well with the formal music of the days of Galuppi; while the more hopeful tonic key of Abt Vogler, the major of this life, indicates that fate and the tonic key have both fallen more under man's control." (Ibid). **When I hear a master play**—when I hear a master musician like yourself play.

**Sts. XIX. Paraphrase**—Then the young Venetians left you to enjoy their sound of pleasures. Then in the fullness of time, death silently overtook them—some died with frustrated lives, with deeds well left undone and they departed for a bourne where the sun never rises.

But when I sit down to reason and think of taking my stand on truth and not to swerve from it and when I rejoice over wresting a closely preserved secret from the laws of nature, you suddenly step in with your pessimistic message, which sends a thrill of creeping horror through every nerve of mine.

**They left you, etc.**—The gay Venetians, enjoying their frivolous pleasures, left Galuppi and went their own way. **In due time**—in the fullness of time; that is, when their days were numbered. **With lives that come to nothing**—with lives that proved utterly ineffectual and abortive. **With deeds as well undone**—with deeds as well left undone. **Tacitly**—quickly. **Too.. sun i. e.** took them to the other world where the sun never rise.

**Sit down to reason**—begin thinking coolly and rationally. **Take my stand nor swerve**—take a firm foothold on truth and never to deflect from it. **Triumph, etc.**—rejoice over the fact that I have wrested a truth from the laws of nature. **Close reserve**—'close' because it is extremely difficult to arrive at the exact truth of things. **Cold music**—sad and pessimistic music, striking a note of warning on mere pleasure seeking and enjoyment of material things. **Till I creep etc.**—till a creeping sensation of horror passes through every nerve of mine.

**Sts. XII-XV. Paraphrase**—Like a ghostly cricket, you creak in the following manner over a house that was burning :



"Vanity, vanity, everything will come to dust and ashes. Venice spent what she earned. But the soul is doubtless immortal, at least the soul that possesses sufficient merit.

"Take for example your own case : you know physics, something of geology and mathematics, too, of God according to their degree of merit. Gay and pleasure-seeking people may dread death, but you will not certainly die."

"So far as Venice and her people are considered, they were born only to enjoy and die. They bore the fruits of mirth and folly. When they stopped kissing young girls, was anything spiritual left in them ? So everything came to nought."

So you sing your jeremiad, and I have not the heart to scold you. Such lovely girls with such lovely hair, with rich gold gold ornaments hanging down and brushing their bosoms well, all of them are now dead and gone, I feel chilly and grown old at the thought.

*Notes.* Like a ghostly cricket, etc.—When the poet uses this epithet, he does not disparage Galuppi. All that he means to say is that Galuppi sang a pessimistic and dreadful note, which was not realised by the wild and extravagant Venetians. But its meaning is quite unmistakable for the poet, who is struck dumb with horror at the futility of all material things. Only the soul remains and rises in the estimation of God according to its merit. Nothing else remains. This is the burden of Galuppi's elegiac toccata, which he sang over the decay and ruin of Venice.

Where a house was burned—i. e., where a rich and powerful province like Venice was on the verge of extinction. Dust and ashes—Cf. "The paths of glory lead but to the grave" Gray's *Elegy* Done with finished. Venice spent, etc.—Venice garnered nothing as her spiritual capital. Where a soul can be discerned at least where there is any modicum of spirituality. You know physics, etc.—The knowledge and pursuit of these sciences contribute to a man's spiritual advance. In their degree—i. e., according to their merit. Butterflies may dread extinction—People seeking petty and flimsy pleasures may be afraid of extinction, but not those who are spiritually advanced. Merely born to bloom and drop—i. e., only born to enjoy worldly things and then fulfil their destiny. Here on earth.....crop—The Venetians had their ephemeral glory, and they reaped the harvest of mirth



and folly. **What of soul etc.**—When the mirthful and flimsy-minded Venetians enjoyed crude fleshly pleasures, they did not attain the least vestige of spiritual power and glory. **I want the .....to scold**—When I listen to you they, too, are now dust and ashes. **The fold**—i. e., the gold ornaments. **Brush their bosoms—i e**, have a close act with their bosoms. **Chilly**—the idea is used in the last line of stanza XI.

## 12. MAY AND DEATH

The *Substance* and *Paraphrase* have given in Special Introduction.

**May and Death**—The summer season is always associated in the poet's mind with the grievous death of his dearly loved cousin, Charles. He cannot dissociate the month of May from the fact of Charles's death in that month. **I wish etc**—I wish that when you died last may, most of the delightful and pleasant things of spring should have departed for ever along with you and those that yet remained should have departed for me, too. A foolish thought this may be laughed at as quite a foolish thought. **There must be, etc**—Many other friends, who are not similarly stricken with grief like myself, merrily walk about arm in arm in the silver and bracing moon-light and pass there time in long summer evenings. **So for their sake etc.**, so far as these happy friends are concerned, let the month of May wear all the charms that it possesses. **Let their new time etc.**—let them enjoy the beauties of May in the very same manner as I did while Charles was living through manifold crowd together (for these happy friends who are enjoying themselves in summer) **only one little sight Expl.** Let only one sight be kept hidden from these happy friends,—a sight reminiscent of the tragic fate of my friend, Charles, prematurely cut off in youth. It is the flower called spotted Persicaria. When summer beauties fill all the woods, there is one green plant that grows there which contains a single streak of blood, split between the leaves. The poet says that it is spring's blood, suggestive of his friend's death. **That... ..spare**—These gay friends may do without this tragic spot in nature; even some wood may be without this plant, but it would be a very small loss. **But I, etc.** But this plant is entirely mine; where that blood-marked leaf grows, my heart bleeds for my dear departed friend, that is all that I can say.



## 13. ECHETLOS

The *Paraphrase* of the poem has been given in the *Special Introduction*.

**N. B.** The central idea of the poem is that it is the merit of the deed that counts and not the name. The boorish peasant who moved down the Persian hordes in the battlefield of Marathon with a ploughshare was nameless ; he never cared for the glory of his name, but he rendered a meek and unassuming service. He never cared for the circulation of his name, but calmly slunk out of the battlefield as soon as victory was achieved. Carlyle echoes the same idea in his essay on *History*; "Which was the greatest innovator, which was the more important personage in man's history, he who first led armies over the Alps, and gained the victories of Cannae and Trasimene : or the nameless boor who first hammered out for himself an iron spade ? When the oak-tree is felled, the whole forest echoes with it ; but a hundred acorns are planted silently by some unnoticed breeze. Battles and war-tumults, which for the time din every ear, and with hoy or terror intoxicate every hearts, pass away like taurn-brawls ; and except some few marathons and Morgartens, are remembered by accident not by desert."

**Here is a story... .. You !**—This is a story, the recounting of which will stir you to the depth of your heart. Breasted contended with, **Beat Barbarians**—defeated the Persians. (All non-Greeks used to be called Barbarians.) **N. B.** Marathon is a village, 22 miles north east of Athens on the sea border of a plain where the Greeks under Miltiades on a world-famous occasion defeated the Persians under Darius in 480 B. C. The plain on which the battle was fought extends between the mountains on the west and the sea on the east.

**Stemmed Persia rolling on**—checked the rushing tide of the invading Persian hordes. **Did the deed**—achieved a supreme victory. **Saved the world**—i. e. saved the Greek world from falling into the hand of the Barbarians. **For the day was Marathon**—think of the day when the great battle of Marathon was won by the Greeks.

**No man but did his manliest**—Every Greek fighter strove his utmost. **Kept rank**—stuck to his army. **In this tribe and file**—many Greek tribes joined hands to present a united front to the



opposing Persians. Was the Spear-arm play—i. e., the spearmen fought a touch fight and wielded their spears right and left. Wind-whipt—swept by the wind. Branchy wood—forest containing many trees. A swing—swung; were wielded (The quick movement of spears is compared with the wind-swept, movement of trees in a forest.)

Kept no rank—belonged to no particular army. And his sole arm...spear—all other Greek soldiers were fighting with their spears, save and except this man who was fighting with a different weapon, namely, swiftly moved about the battlefield like a flash of lightning. Van—front part of the army. Rear—back part of the army. The man was ubiquitous. Brightened the battle up—infused inspiration into the hearts of the fighters.

Nor helmed, etc.—The man had no helmet and no shield. All his wear—made up his entire garment. Like a tiller of the soil—like a cultivator who tills the ground. With a clown's... bare—his limbs were broad and bare like those of boorish peasant. Ploughing on and on moving down the enemy as he advanced more and more. Pushed—fought and advanced. (Because the man fought with a ploughshare he was called Echetlos or Holder of the Ploughshare).

Did the weak mid-line etc.—In these lines the poet describes how this strange Wielder of the Ploughshare rendered help at every point where it was needed most. If the central part of the army became weakened, he was there and if the right wing flinched and faltered through the death of their general, the man was equally present there. Again, if the Greek phalanx fell into a disarray and confusion, the ubiquitous fighter rushed on to that place also. In this way he saved the situation in a wonderfully heroic manner. Tunnies—large oceanic fish used as food. Precipitates—Throws violently. Bulk—huge size. Halt pause and falter. Stark—(adv) quite wholly. His heap of slain—his refers to Kallimachos. Polemarch—Greek military commander-in-Chief with varying civil functions. Phalanx—Greek line of battle, especially a body of Macedonian infantry drawn up in close order (Sanskrit, Byuha).

To the rescue—the clown at once rushed to the rescue. At the need—at the supreme hour of need. Ploughing Persia—killing the Persian hordes with his ploughshare. Clearing.....weed—lacking the Persians and thus freeing the Greek soil from pest.



**Routed—forced. Saklon—** Persian (from “Sacw, one of the most numerous and most powerful of the Scythian nomad tribes. They were very warlike, they excelled as cavalry and as archers both on horse and foot. The name of the Sacae is often used loosely for other Scythian and sometimes for the Scythians in general”—Smith) mede-or Medes inhabited media, and important country of Asia above Persia. Media was one of the most important provinces of the ancient Persian Empire. (Cf. The idiomatic expression, ‘the laws of the Medes and the Persians’;

**But the deed won—but** when he had fought the battle and won victory. **Desc Reid—** seen. **Far and wine—** near and far. **The last.....** seaside—the farthest place for the seaside where the last of the enemy had been killed.

**Blazed** – shone brightly. **Thonged—** bound with leather-saps. **Brown** this indicates brawn or muscle. **Shearing—** Cutting. **Share—** ploughshare. **Down.....** pomp—all the pomp and glory of the mighty Persian Empire were made to kiss the humble dust. **Ploughen for Greece—** fought with a ploughshare on behalf Greece.

**How spoke the Oracle ?—** in all their difficulties the Greeks used to consult the national oracle at Delphi where there was a temple of Apollo. **Helpful—** who stood us in good stead in our dire distress. **The Holder of the Ploughshare—** the man had no name, let him be known by the deed he wrought—Echetlos, or Wielder of the Ploughshare. **The great deed ne’er grows small—** the greatness of a deed is never minimised because the name of the doer is not known.

**Not the great name ! etc.—** *Expl.* Browning here points out the uselessness of having great names. There was Miltiades, the great Greek soldier, but he was extremely selfish. There was Themistokles, who played the traitor. Their great names are recorded in the pages of history. But that heroic Wielder of the Ploughshare ever remains under the shelter of anonymity. But what of that ? He will always be known by his deed.

**Miltiades—** He was a great Athenian general. When Athens was threatened with invasion by the Persians under Darius and Artaphernes, he was chosen one of the ten generals. Miltiades induced the Pole-march Callimachus to give the casting vote in favour of risking a battle with the enemy. He waited till his turn came and then drew his army up in battle array on the ever-



memorable field of Marathon. After the defeat of the Persians, Miltiades induced the Athenians to entrust to him an armament of 70 ships, without knowing the purpose for which they were designed. He proceeded to attack the island of Paros, for the purpose, of gratifying a private enmity. His attacks were, however, unsuccessful and he was disgraced and imprisoned by his countrymen for having used his country's resources for self-aggrandisement.

**Themistokles**—a great and celebrated Athenian general, who defeated the Persian fleet of Xerxes in the great naval battle of Salamis. This victory, which was due to Themistokles established his reputation among the Greeks. But he was accused of peculation and ostracised. He took refuge in the enemy's court in Persia, where he gained much popularity. But before he could accomplish anything he died, probably by poison, administered by himself, from despair of accomplishing anything against his country. Themistokles had great talents, but little morality.

**Name not the clown like these**—the Weilder of the Ploughshare was a greater man than anyone of these and it is but proper that he had no name : otherwise he would have unfortunately been bracketed with those two inglorious persons.

#### 14. THE LABORATORY

The *Gist* and *Summary* of the poem have been given earlier.

**St. 1. Substance.** The speaker who is a woman intent upon the destruction of her rival with the help of poison enquired of the chemist 'which is the poison to poison her.'

**Notes.** **Tying the glass mask etc.**—she has worn a glass mask to protect herself from the poisonous fumes. **Faint smokes curling whitely**—the poison consisted principally of arisen. The white deadly smokes which the mineral gave off are referred to. Note how these words "sufficiently supplant our knowledge of the old poisoner's art to enable us to indicate its nature. "Pliest thy trade-dost carry on thy business (of manufacturing poison); art engaged in the preparation of poison. **Devils smithy**—the workshop where the Devil forges his instruments; the devil's work-shop. The laboratory is meant where the chemist is engaged in the devilish work of preparing poison. Which is the poison to poison her "Mr. Arthur Symonds reminds us that Rossetti's first water colour was antillustration of this poem, and has for



subject and title the line "which is the poison to her, prithee". (Berdoe). **Prithee**—I pray thee ; pray tell me.

**St. 2. Substance.** The lady says that she knows what her rival and her lover are doing and that they believe that she has repaired to the church to pray for them. But it is not to the church that she has gone. She has come to a chemist's laboratory to buy poison which she means to administer to his rival.

**Notes.** **He is with her etc.**—stress her and the first know. **He**—her lover. **Her**—her rival. **They**—her rival and her lover. **They laugh, laugh at me**—stress they and me. **fled to the drear empty etc.**—they think that I have run away from society and repaired to the lonesome Church to pray etc. Note the antithesis between tears and laughter, me and church and laboratory. **Here**—not in the church but in this laboratory, not to to pray God for them but to buy poison for her destruction.

**St. 3. Substance.** She is not in haste. The chemist therefore need not hurry the preparation of the poison. She watch him at his deadly work there than go to King's.

**Notes.** **Must up**—crush ; pound. **I am not etc.** as Dr. Berdoe remarks, "the patience of the woman, who in her eagerness for her rival's death has no desire to hurty the manufacture of the means of it, is powerfully described. She is content to watch the chemist at his deadly work, asking questions in a dainty manner about the secrets, of his art. **Thus**—here in your laboratory watching you at your work. **Kings**—some fashionable restaurant where they were having a dance.

**St. 4. Substance.** The woman asks the chemist questions in a dainty manner about the secrets of his art.

**Notes.** **Mortar**—Vessel of hard material in which ingredients are pounded by pestle. **Brave**—admirable ; magnificent. See Notes appended to the Text. **Gold** referring to the bright yellow colour of the exudation. **Oozings**—the gum which exudes from the bark of the tree.

**Yonder soft phial etc.**— The lady questions the chemist about the secrets of his art and the one object in which she is now interested is poison. **Soft Phial**—referring to the delicate colour of the liquid it contains. **Exquisite blue**—lovely shade of



blue. **Sure to taste sweetly**—the idea is that the liquid which has such a fascinating hue is bound to taste sweet. **Is that poison, too**—the thought of poison is uppermost in the speaker's mind. In her present state of mind, there is only thing that she can think of and that is poison.

St. 5. *Substance.* Revelling in the prospect of poisoning her rival, the lady thinks how she would have felt if she had all the poisons in the chemist's laboratory.

*Notes.* **Treasures**—the poisonous preparations which are in the laboratory and which in her present state of mind, she values so highly. **Wild crowd of invisible pleasures**—the lady conjures up visions of the pleasures of successful poisoning. **Pleasures**—of poisoning, which alone can delight her in her present state. **Pure**—sure ; certain, **Casket**—small box usually of precious material for jewels etc. **Signet**—private seal, or perhaps signet-ring, i. e., finger-ring with seal set in it. **Fanmount**—Ornamental metal part of the fan. **Filigree basket**—basket made of fine gold or silver wire formed into delicate tracery.

St. 6. *Substance.* She imagines how by a mere lozenge or by the poisonous fumes of a lighted pastille, she will be able to kill people whom she chooses to remove.

*Notes.* **Lozenge**—the Lozenge will contain poison and the unsuspecting victim will suck it and expire. **Just thirty minutes to live**—she would expire after half an hour. **Pastille**—small roll of aromatic paste, burnt as fumigator etc ; the pastille would give off poisonous fumes when burnt.

St. 7. *Substance.* The lady thinks that the colour of the poison is rather forbidding. She therefore asks the chemist to make the colour soft and enticing such as would brighten the drink and tempt her rival to taste it.

*Notes.* **Quick—it is finished ?**—What, you have made it so quickly ; Is the poison ready ? **The colour's too grim**—the lady remarks that the poison has a forbidding look ; the colour is repellent and unalluring. **Why not soft like etc.**—she wants the poison to have a delicate and alluring colour such as would tempt her rival to drink it off eagerly. **Enticing**—inviting ; alluring. **Dim-soft**—delicate. **Brighten her drink**—give a bright sparkling hue to her drink with which it will be mixed. **Ere she fix and prefer**—before she hesitates and eventually puts it by, choosing not to drink it.



St. 8. *Substance.* She notices that it is only a drop and fears that it may not prove adequate, her rival not being small like herself.

*Notes.* What a drop' what, do you think such a small does will suffice? "She has all the ideas of a big dose which the uninitiated think requisite for big patients". Notice how the eager ferocious joy with which she watches the preparation of the posion is dashed by the fear of its being inadequate. Minton—here used in the sense of a spoilt darling. That's why she ensnares him—the lady thinks that her big stature is the secret of her rival's success, that it is on account of her big stature that she has succeeded in entrapping the affections of her lover. This never will free the soul from those masculine eyes—what the lady fears is that such a tiny drop of poison will not kill a big, masculine woman like her rival. Say, 'No!' to that pulse's magnificent come-and-go-stop the vigorous beating of her pulse, pause the pulse, cause the pulse of a strong woman like herself to stop beating. So 'no' to-stop. Come-and-go—beating; pulsation; movement.

St. 9. *Substance.* The lady explains why she thinks that the drop will be inadequate. Her rival is not an ordinary woman. She cast upon her looks of the most withering hatred and scorn and thought that she would collapse under them but she did not.

*Notes.* For—explains the reason why she thinks that the drop will not prove adequate. They—her rival and her lover. I brought my own eyes etc.—she thought that her rival would collapse under her withering glances. Shrivelled—withered up. She fell not etc.—one who did not collapse under those fierce glances could not possible be killed by a mere drop. Yet this drop does it all!—yet you think this little drop will suffice to kill her.

St. 10. *Substance*—She thinks that perhaps the chemist wants to lessen the agony of death and therefore gives a small dose. But she does not want him to spare her any pain. On the other hand, she wishes that her death should be very painful attended with a hedious distortion of her countenance so that her lover would never be able to forget the dying face.



*Notes.* **Not that I bid you etc.**—Do not prescribe a small dose under the impression that I want you to mitigate her agony of death. **Let death be felt etc.**—let her feel the agony of death; let her death be a very painful one and let the the hedious distortion of her face prove the fact ; let the severe agony of death be evident on her face. **Proof**—evidence of the agony remain on her face. **Its grace**—the serene beauty which death imparts to the countenance. **He**—the lover. **Dying face**—the hedious distortion of her countenance on account of the intense pain that she felt while dying.

**St. 11. Substance.** She asks if the poison is prepared and she might take the mask off. The poison kills her rival and and there is nothing more to be said about it. Is it likely to injure herself too ? Reassured on that point, she takes the mask off and offers the chemist her whole fortune for reward.

*Notes.* **Is it done ?**—Is the poison prepared ? **Take my mask off**—then she might take off the mask as there would be no more poisonous fumes to protect herself from. **Be not morose**—she fancies she sees a change come over the chemists' countenance and imagines it is due to a sense of penitence for aiding in the crime. Perhaps, she thinks, the chemist is sorry for what he has done. **It kills her etc.**—this is how the lady seeks to console the chemist. She tells him that he should not think seriously about the matter, examine it critically from the moral standpoint. It kills her rival and that according to her is the best justification of the action. She considers it almost an act of merit to kill an abnoxious rival. **Prevents**—precludes would not allow **Seeing it closely**—examining the thing minutely. **This delicate droplet etc.**—for reward, she offers the chemist her whole fortune, **Can it ever hurt me ?**—Is it likely to injure herself too, she asks ?

**St. 12. Substance.** She gives the chemist all her jewels. He may have gold to his fill. He may kiss her besides, and on the mouth if he will. All shame, all womanly reserve are gone. But before she leaves, the chemist must brush the dust of his laboratory off her "lest horror it brings" ere she knows it the next time she goes to dance at the King's.

*Notes.* **Gorge Gold to your fill**—take as much gold as you like. **Gorge**—devour greedily. **Fill**—satiety ; to your heart's content. **But brush this dust etc.**—the lady does not wish to have anything on her person that would remind her person that would



remind her of her visit to the chemist's laboratory. The dust of the laboratory she would brush off lest it should remind her of her visit to the laboratory and of the purpose thereof. She wants to kill and after that, to think no more about it. She does not want to have a remembrancer. She is unsexed by jealousy for the time being but after all she is a woman, with all a woman's frailties and limitations.

### 15. TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

*The Central thought and Summary of the poem have been given in the Special Introduction.*

See poem No. 5 under *Notes and Explanations*.

There is a rarer, subtler pathos in *Two in the Campagna*. The outward scene finds its way to his senses, and its images make a language for his mood, or else they break sharply across it any sting it to a cry. He feels the Campagna about him, with its tranced immensity lying bare to heaven :—

“Silence and passion, joy and peace,  
An everlasting wash of air.....  
Such life here, through such length of hours,  
Such miracles performed in play,  
Such primal naked forms of flowers,  
Such letting nature have her way  
While heaven look from its towers ;”

and in the presence of that large sincerity of nature he would fain also “be unashamed of soul” and probe love's wound to the core. But the invisible barriers will not be put aside or transcended, and in the midst of that “infinite passion” there remain “the finite hearts that yearn.” Or else he wakes after the quarrel in the bliteness of a bright dawn :—

“All is blue again  
after last night's rain,  
And the South dries the hawthorn spray.  
Only, my love's away !  
I'd as lief that the blue were grey”.

The diasters of love rarely, with Browning stir us very deeply. His temperament was too elastic, his intellect too resourceful, to enter save by artificial processes into the mood of



blank and hopeless grief. Tragedy did not lie in his blood and fortune-kinder to the man than to the poet—had as yet denied him, in love, the “baptism of sorrow” which has wrung immortal verse from the lips of frailer men.

In the Campagna outside Rome one is reminded of a vanished civilization. Nature in spring seems to breathe the soul and passion of the past. Such is the lover’s thread of thought as it reaches the ‘orange cup’ where the beetles ‘grope among the honey-meal’. But he is diffident and hesitant, and the ‘good minute’ is lost. It seems to him that he ‘belongs’ no more than the thistle down which is blown aimlessly on.

The comment on this is provided in ‘*By the Fire-side*’, II. 192-2.

The poem reflects the lover’s ‘stream of consciousness’, and is remarkable in its fusing of outward and inward impressions.

St. 1. *Substance*. The speaker who is a man asks the woman whom he loves and who loves him, whether she too felt a longing for the infinite like him, as they sat surveying the Campagna that lay spread out around them.

*Notes*. **I wonder etc.**—The speaker is a man who says all this to woman whom he loves and who also loves him. **To stray in spirit through the land**—wandering about mentally which is better than actual wandering; surveying mentally; contemplating. **Sand**—the Campagna. **This morn of Rome and May**—Rome on this May morning. As Dr. Berdoe remarks: “Is the reflective mind, this ghost of old Rome is full of suggestions; its vast, almost limitless extent, as it seems to the traveller; its abundant herbage and floral wealth in early spring... fills the mind with a sweet sadness which readily awakens a feeling for the infinite.”

St. 2. *Substance*. “The Roman Campagna, with its contrasts of ‘Passion’ and ‘peace’ the life of flowers and insects, so full of heat and energy, yet so brief and ineffectual, the ruins that speak at once of antiquity and of the brevity of the human generations, the limitless plain stretching away out of sight—turns the lover’s thought to the baffling enigma of life. How to reconcile ‘Passion’ and ‘peace’?” The clue to the enigma seems to glance across him in the form of a gossamer thread (spider’s thread).



*Notes.* **For me, I touched etc.**—The scene around awakened in me in a longing for the infinite a yearning to grasp the Infinite, to transcend the finite bounds of my nature. **Tantalized**—tormented with hopes that seemed continually on the point of fulfilment. **Like turns of threads etc.**—like a gossamer thread lying across the path and seeming to obstruct passage although breaking off and floating into the invisible when grasped. The lover would realise the Infinite in the finite but is ever tantalized and eluded by it. **Mocking**—seeming to offer resistance but breaking off and floating into the invisible when grasped.

**Sts. 3 and 4. Substance.** He traces the spider's thread from point to point, by the objects on which it rests. He calls his love to help him to hold it fast.

*Notes.* **Help me to hold it**—The lover calls the woman to help him to hold the thread fast, to help him to discover the solution of the enigma. **First it left etc.**—he traces the thread point to point. **Fennel**—a yellow-flowered fragrant herb. **Run to seed**—tend to develop seed. **Brickwork's cleft**—fissure or cranny in the masonry. **Floating weft**—the thread as it floated along. **Weft**—lit. **Cross**—threads woven into warp to make web : loosely used in the sense of web : cobweb. **Orange cup**—calyx, the rounded cavity, of the orange flower.

**Sts. 5 and 6. Substance.** The campagna is around him, with its vast stretches of feathery grass, its floral wealth and the ruins, the crumbling relics, of the cities that once stood there. **"It's contrasts of passion and Peace**—the life of flowers and insects—so full of heat and energy yet so brief and ineffectual, the ruins that speak at once of antiquity and of the brevity of the human generations—turn the lover's thought to the baffling enigma of life."

*Notes.* **Champaign**—the Roman Campagna. See Introductory Remarks. **Endless fleece of feathery grasses**—vast limitless stretches of feathery grass. **Silence and passion**—suggestive of passion of life and of silence, of peace. **Wash of air**—wind-swept ; breezy. **Rome's ghost**—dotted with evidences of Rome's vanished glory. **Decease**—death ; decay ; downfall. **Life**—life of insects and flowers. **Such miracles**—performed in play so full of heat and energy. **Primal naked forms etc.**—abundance of flowers growing in a state of nature. **Letting nature have her way**—luxuriance, abundance of nature. **From its towers**—from above.



**Sts. 7 and 8. Substance.** He longs to rest in the affection of the woman who loves him and whom he also loves. He says to her, "I would that you were all to me". If they cannot be completely united where does the fault lie? He asks.

**Notes.** **How say you?** etc.—The lover wants to know what his beloved has got to say. **Dove**—darling. **Let us be unashamed** etc.—Let us lay bare our souls to each other as the earth lies bare unto the sky. **All to me**—without stint of reserve; wholly. **Nor yours nor mine**, etc.—neither wholly yours nor wholly mine; neither wholly a slave nor wholly your own mistress. **Where does the fault lie?**—He asks his love to help him to unravel this mystery, to solve this enigma. **What is the meaning of it all**—where does the fault lie, if fault there be? he asks. **Care of the wound**—the plague-spot; the root of the mischief.

**St. 9. Substance.** He would fain lose his separate identity and become wholly absorbed in the beloved.

**Notes.** **Adopt your will, see with your eyes** etc.—become one with you; lose my separate identity and become wholly merged in you. **Soul's springs**—the fountain of your soul. **Your part my part** etc.—become one.

**Sts. 10 and 11. Substance.** But whenever their union seems complete, his soul is spirited away and he is adrift again. He remains separate; he cannot transcend the finite bounds of his nature; the yearning is unfulfilled. Must he continue to drift farther and farther away? Will no propitious destiny stop this deviation? He asks.

**Notes.** **No**—that is not to be. **Touch you close** etc.—when the union seems complete, my soul is spirited away. **Pluck the rose** etc.—hold you and long to rest in your love. **Then the good minute goes**—forthwith the happy union is over; the blissful moment passes away. **Already how am I so far** etc.—he wonders how he could have drifted away so far so soon. **Must I go** etc.—like the thistle-ball carried along by the breeze. **Must I continue** to drift farther and farther away without let or hindrance, and will not kind destiny stop it? **Still**—ever. **Thistle ball**—the globular head of the thistle, a kind of prickly shout; thistle-seed, thistle-down. **No bar**—nothing to stop it. **Friendly star**—kind destiny. The reference is to the belief in planetary influence. A man's life was supposed to be influenced by the star or planet which happened to be in the ascendant at his birth.



St. 12. *Substance*. Whenever he seems about to learn the secret, to be absorbed in the beloved. His soul is spirited away. And just as he calls his love to help him to hold the gossamer thread fast it breaks off and floats into the invisible. And this goes on for ever. His doom is endless change. The tired, tantalized spirit realises that the yearning can never be fulfilled ; yet it ever seeks to grasp the Infinite in the finite, only to be ever eluded by it.

*Notes*. Just when I seemed etc.—understand the meaning of it all ; just when their union seems complete. **Thread**—the spider's thread which seemed to provide a clue to the enigma, and which he traced everywhere round him. **Off again ?**—Does it go off again ? It breaks off and floats into the invisible. **The old trick**—the same deception has been going on, the same trick is being repeated. **Only I discern infinite passion** etc.—This is the sentiment of the poem the pain of a heart restless and weary, ever seeking to grasp the Infinite in the finite and ever eluded by it. "We must live alone. We cannot lose altogether our separate identity, and become wholly absorbed in another. "The finite bounds of our nature cannot be so transcended. We remain separate the yearning is unfulfilled." "The restful music, the an odeno however pure."

## 16. LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

The *Central thought* and fuller *Substance* have already been given.

Berdoo described this poem as 'a landscape by Poussin in words'. It was written on 3 January 1852, when Browning's intention was to write a poem a day. The alternate stanzas mark the contrast between past and present, between the pomp and circumstance of royal city and the peace of a pastoral landscape which hides its ruins, and between the glory, gold, shame and vanity of an empire and the triumph of love. At one point the landscape recalls that of 'Two in the Campagna' though the love theme of the latter is less simple and idealized. 'Love Among the Ruins' invites comparison with Hardy's 'In Time of "The Breaking of Nations"'.  
 1. 30, **Stock or stone :**

From Milton's 'On the Late Massacre in Piedmont'—



When all our fathers worshipt stock and stones.

Originally a 'stock' was a stump of a tree ; here, probably the base of a pillar.

l. 71. Ere we rush : Cf. 'Cristina'—

This she felt as, looking at me,  
Mine and her souls rushed together.

*The Title. Love*—Browning here elevates sincere, hearty love between man and woman to a superiority over all earthly ambition, glories, and achievements. These latter are bound to pass away but love is eternal. Love is eternal in the sense that it is a quality of the soul, and is to be perfected in eternity in the life that one must take up to round off and complete all the best qualities of the soul. *Among the ruins*—the scene of the happy meeting of two lovers is laid among the ruins of the Roman Campagna in Italy, which the poet visited in 1853-54. They met in a solitary turret of the now non-existent palace—the sole surviving thing that mark the site of the once splendid palace. See Sp Introduction.

Thomas Hardy in a different, but not dissimilar context (that of the devastating First World War) in his characteristic thoughtful but brief manner treats the same thesis—that love is an elemental passion that persists through all human devastations :

“Yonder a maid and her wight  
Come shispering by :  
War's annals will cloud into night  
Ere their story die”.

N. B. *The speaker of “Love Among the Ruins” is a simple shepherd whose cottage and fold are in the solitary pasture lands of the Campagna.*

St. 1—2. The twilight colours the pastures where once stood a great city.

St. 1. *Summary.* The quiet glow of the twilight flushes the long stretches of pasture lands ; and the sheep return to their fold in a leisurely manner. It is said that this place was once the site of a big town, the capital of the country, where mighty rulers held their courts and decided peace or war with neighbouring countries.

l 1. *Where*—i. e., the spot where. *Quiet coloured*—soft, calm, peace-infusing glow of twilight. *End of evening*—close



of twilight fading into the grey of evening. *l.* 2. Miles and miles over long stretches. *l.* 3. Solitary pastures—lonely grazing lands, covered with grass and shrubs but almost uninhabited and abandoned. The ruins of the Roman Campagna are meant here. The Campagna is a vast area outside Rome, stretching over what was in ancient times called Latium. See Sp. Intro. Our sheep—the speaker is a young shepherd. *l.* 4. Half—asleep drowsy. *l.* 5. Tinkle homeward—return to their fold as the balls tied round their necks jingle softly. Stray—i. e. some sheep of the flock wander a little away from the flock. Stop..... crop—pause here and there to nibble the grass or plants on the way back. Crop—nibble, tear with the teeth to eat. The lines remind us of the opening of Gray's *Elegy* and Matthew Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy*. Cf.

“And drowsy thinkings lull the distant felds.”—Gray

“Now fades the flimmering landscape on the sight,”

—Gray

“And only the white sheep are sometimes seen  
Cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch'd green,”

—Arnold

*l.* 7. Was—its nom. is ‘where’ in line 1 ; i. e. the place. Site—place occupied by. City..... gay—big city full of the bustle of life and splendour of buildings, towers, etc. *l.* 8. So they say—N. B. This is purely Browning's imagination. “He sees in the ruins of aqueducts, villas and tombs the remains of a great city—the creation of his fancy, for such a city never existed on the Roman Campagna” (Mrs. Glazebrook). *l.* 9. Very capital—the capital itself. The city was no mean city—it was the capital of the country. *ll.* 9–11. Its prince.....court in—in which (city) the princes (rulers) of the country in long past ages held their courts. *l.* 11. Gathered councils—summoned assemblies to discuss policies. Wielding far—exercising i. e. swaying their power over distant part of the country or neighbouring countries. *l.* 12. Peace or war—i. e. determining whether the nation would pursue policy of peace or declare war upon other people.

N. B. Note the evolution of the poem. Alternate stanzas give nicely contrasted scenes one describing the present peace, quiet and bareness of the whole scene, and the next reverting to a recreation of the grandeur, activity, and magnificence of the past. It is best to take each pair of stanzas as a unit. In the last



stanza (St. 7) the contrast is artistically summed up, leading to the quiet, unquestioned conclusion "Love is best".

St. 2. *Now the region is bare where once stood a well-girt city.*

St. 2. *Summary.* Not a single tree stands on these vast stretches of green pasture lands ; only a few mountain rivulets intersect the plain and distinguish one plot from another. But in ancient times, there stood the city with its lofty towers ; it was surrounded by a marble wall with a hundred broad gates.

l. 13. *The country*—the whole region. *Does.. tree*—not possess a single (big) tree. l. 14. *As you see*—as you can see for yourself. Browning cannot do without some vivid dramatic touches, which often require him even in lyrics and narrative to say something in parentheses. l. 15. *To distinguish*—to mark out. *Slopes*—undulating plains ; mostly, low valleys of small hills. *Verdure*—greenness. *Slopes of verdure*—inclined planes covered with green grass. *Rills*—small brooks. l. 17. *Intersect*—cut up the plain into plots. *Give a name to*—specify each plot from the next. *Else...one*—that is, had not this long stretch of pasture land been cut up by the rills into separate plots, the slopes would appear to be, what they really are, one vast, uniform monotony of undemarcated pastureland. ll. 15-18 *To distinguish ....into one*—the vast long stretch of the pasture land is really one uniform area of green pasture-land; only a few rivulets running down from the hills cross the area and cut it up into different plots and define their area. If we ignore these brooks, we get a sight of what the whole land is a vast green stretch.

(St.-4) l. 19. *Where*—i. e. on a spot of this vast stretch is standing. *Domed*—having a big dome ; i. e. circular vault on the roof. *Daring*—as if ambitiously raising its head with dome and towers. *Shot*—sent up high in the sky. *Spires*—tall towers. l. 20. *Like fires*—glittering in the sunlight and looking like flames of fire rising up into the sky.

N. B. In ancient times, the tops of such towers were ornamented with brass or other metal work ; hence the aptness of the comparison. l. 21. *Hundred-gated*—having a hundred gates. *Circuit*—circumference. l. 22. *Bounding a'l*—containing, surrounding and protecting the whole city—its palace, monuments, etc. l. 23. *Made of marble*—the wall was made of



marble stones. // 23-24. **Men might march.....abreast**—as the construction suggests the wall was so broad that twelve soldiers might march side by side on it without the necessity of crowding close for want of sufficient space. But Browning does not usually care very much for strict grammatical construction to convey his sense ; more often, it is the grammar of sense that he cares for. It seems that he here refers to the width of the gates, through which armed men twelve abreast could easily issue forth in times of emergency Cf. Coleridge,

“The gate that was ironed within and without,  
Where an army in battle array had marched out.”  
—Christabel

**Nor he prest**—the twelve men had not to crowd close for want of sufficient space. **Abreast**—side by side.

*Exp'*. Now, the country twelve, abreast (//. 13-24). Browning is giving a contrast between the old magnificence of the Roman Campagna and its present desolation. As far as the eye can see, it does not meet a single tree within the country around. All those hilly tracts are now a wide stretch of grass-covered slopes with nothing to distinguish one slope from another. Only a few mountain rivulets, flowing down the slopes and gliding through the valleys below, cut up by their intersections this vast stretch and demarcate one area from another. But there was a time when on a particular site of this vast solitary pastureland stood a magnificent palace. Its towers seemed to shoot up insolently into the sky rising from the circular poem that capped the top. These towers with their metal ornaments glittered and dazzled in the sunlight, looking like quivering flames of fire. And they stood high above a wide surrounding marble wall built to protect the great capital town of the land. The wall was so broad that twelve armed men might march side by side on them without feeling inconvenienced for want of sufficient space.

St. 3. *Green grass now covers all traces of the city which was once alive with human passions.*

St. 3. *Summary.* A thick, soft, carpet-like layer of grass now covers the ruins of the old city. The city was once alive with a large population with their joys and sorrows. The citizens were cheered by hopes of glory, depressed by fear of shame. Their glory and shame, as in so many cases, were connected with material profit and loss.



*l.* 25. **Perfection**—Profusion, richness. *l.* 26. **Never was**—could be seen in no other place. *l.* 27. **Carpet**—smooth, soft layer of grass. **This summer time**—now, when the season is summer. *l.* 28. **Embeds**—hides covers. *l.* 29. **Vestige**—trace, ruined remains. **Guessed alone**—only to be inferred; not directly visible. **Stock**—base upon which something heavy rests; here broken bases of pillars, etc. **Stone**—blocks of stone which made walls. **Stock or stone**—in apposition with ‘vestige’. The ‘vestige’ or trace that there was once a city here is only to be guessed from the stock or stone. *ll.* 29-30. **Every vestige ... or stone**—here and there a broken base of a pillar or a block of stone, now almost covered under a layer of green grass is the only indication that there was a flourishing city on the site in some remote days.

*l.* 31. **Where**—in which city (when it stood there) **Multitude of man**—a large population. **Breathed... woe**—lived with the usual joys and sorrows of life. *l.* 33. **Lust**—desire. **Glory**—special distinction; power and pre-eminence in the eyes of the people. **Pricked**—Cheered, stimulated. **Dread**—fear. **Shame**—popular disapprobation; social disapproval. *l.* 35. **Alike**—equally. **Gold**—here stands for ‘material gains’. *l.* 36. **Bought and sold**—acquired or parted with. *ll.* 35-36. **And that glory and ... sold**—like all other men in other civilized cities, the people of that city too set their hearts upon individual material prosperity. They thought it a glory to be able to amass more and more gold, and considered it a shame to have to part with their amassed gold. In other words, possession of gold i. e. material advantages, was the criterion of their happiness, and its loss, the mark of humiliation.

*Expl.* **where a multitude... and sold** (*ll.* 31-36). Browning in his *Love among the Ruins* imagines that a magnificent city once stood on the site which is now in complete ruins. In a series of splendid stanzas he offers contrast between the splendour and glory of the whole region in the past, teeming with life and activity and its present desolation. In that remote past, the city was inhabited by a large population. The people had their usual, human rounds of joys and sorrow; they too, like all other men of big cities, past and present, were stimulated by desire for glory and were depressed by the fear of shame; they too measured their glory and shame by the amount of wealth they could call their own. They felt it a glory to be able to secure material



advantages by their mercantile and other activities and felt it a shame to have to part with their material possessions under adverse strokes of fortune.

*St. 4. Only one turret of a tower survives from where the king viewed the games.*

*St. 4. Summary.* There once stood a tall tower in the centre of a circular ring for games. The king and his party used to observe the blazing chariots, running races. Of this tower only a small turret now remains standing. It is covered under wild creepers and their flowers.

*l. 37. Turret*—small tower forming part of a big building. *Remains*—still stands. *l. 39. Caper*—kind of bramble-like shrub. *Over-rooted*—overgrown, the roots, peeping out everywhere. *Gourd*—creeper with large round leaves. *Overscored*—crossed and re-crossed overmuch ; overcrowded. *l. 40. Patching*—growing in patches in various spots. *House-leek*—a herb with pink flowing on walls and roofs. *Head of blossom*—tops of the houseleek herbs full of flowers. *Winks*—peeps. *l. 42. Chinks*—fissures ; cracks in the walls of the turret.

*(St. 8) l. 43. Marks*—indicates. *Basement*—lowest part of the structure. *Tower*—tall square or circular structure. *l. 44. Sublime*—on high. *l. 45. Burning*—glaringly bright. *Ring*—circular course round the tower as the create. *Traced*—marked. *l. 46. Recede*—ran in competition, *And a burning..... raced*—there was a circular race course round the tower, and as the chariots ran in high speed their metal sheets dazzled and glittered in the sun ; so that all the chariots taken together made a bright, moving circle round the tower. *l. 47. Minions*—favourites. *Dames*—mistresses. *l. 48. Games*—chariot-racing, wrestling, fencing, etc, the favourite pastimes of the Romans in their hey-day.

*St. 5. In the quiet evening a girl waits in the turret for her lover.*

*St. 5. Summary.* In the quiet twilight when the sheep are peacefully shut up in their fold and the shades of evening obscure the landscape, a yellow-haired girl, looking out in eager, silent expectation, is waiting in the lonely turret for her lover.



Line 49. **I know**—the speaker's some shepherd of the locality—the narrator of the poem. It is a "dramatic lyric" put into the mouth of a happy lover. **Quiet-coloured eve**—sober, softly tinged twilight. **l. 50 Smiles**—seems happy. **To leave—to send.** **l. 51. Folding**—sheepfold. **Smiles.. folding**—the soft tender light of the evening seems to be pleased to see sheep gone to rest, shut up in their pens. **Many tinkling fleece**—flock of sheep with many bells ringing gently so as to make a harmony of different notes. **l. 53. Slopes**—hill sides. **Rills**—mountain brooks. **Undistinguished grey**—mild darkness which obliterates the sharp features of the landscape obscuring everything into a stretch of dimness. **l. 54. Melt away**—lose themselves from sight. Cf. "Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight."—Gray.

**l. 55. That a girl—I know** (line 49) that my beloved girl. **l. 57. In the turret**—see line 37. **Charioteers**—chariot-drivers; the men who ran the chariots in competitive race. **Caught soul**—received inspiration; felt encouraged. **l. 58. For the goal**—to reach the goal first and win the prize. **l. 59. When...looked**—i. e., the charioteers felt encouraged and cheered when the king looked upon them from the high tower. **l. 57-59. Whence the charioteers...king looked**—as the chariot drivers competing in the race had some favourable or admiring gaze from the king who sat on the tower, each was inspired by the seeming encouragement to strive to beat the rest and reach the goal first. **l. 49. Whence...now**—i. e., the girl now looks on the site below the tower where the ring was in ancient times. **Breathless**—full of keen longing. **Dumb**—silent. **N. B.** It is in this stanza that we have the first indication of the real subject-matter of the poem, "Love among the Ruins"; so long the ruins seemed to have been the main interest of the poem. But the long contrast between the present calm, peace, solitude and charm of quiet Nature on the hand, and the pomp splendour, haughty magnificence of the city in the past, on the other, is a nice artistic preparation in which the background is so successfully given as to react on the love that is now described by a few significant touches. Coming to the stanza, we do not feel that the main subject-matter of the poem is the "ruins"; somehow, we feel that we have been led by a master artist into the romance of true love through nature's peace and quiet which mock man's noisy uproar. We at once feel that the



eternal greenness of youthful love as compared to the ever-recurring of human passions and ambitions is reflected by the perennially calm greenness of Nature as compare to the ever-crumbling devastations of human monuments.

*St. 6. In the turret from where once the king looked proudly out, the girl will meet her lover in speechless embrace.*

**St. 6. Summary.** From the turret the monarch had a proud view of all his territory with its engineering and architectural monuments and its teeming millions ; now the girl's lover will meet her there ; she will gaze at his eyes and then they will clasp each other in silent embrace. *l. 61.* **He**—the king. **N. B.** the order of thought is changed from this stanza. So long the poet was speaking of the present in the first stanza, followed by a description of the past in the next. Here he first speaks of what used to take place in the past in the turret and then gives the contrasted present. *ll. 61-62.* **He looked... wide**—in that remote past when tower and turret stood whole and entire, and the city and territory wore a look of material splendour, the kind used to have a wide view of all around from the high turret. The turret being so high gave a large prospect of the whole territory of the king *l. 63* **All the mountains... temples**—i. e. he looked upon all the mountains round about and these had temples built on their tops, of course, surrounded by human habitation. **Glades**—open spaces in the forests. **Colonnades**—series of columns ; series of vertical tapering pillar-like monuments.

Rows of tall trees are also called 'colonnades' and since here the reference is to 'glades', this latter meaning suits better, though rows of trees would not be handiwork of men while temples, causeys, etc., mentioned along with colonnades are so. Cf.

"The poplars are fell'd farewell to the shade,  
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade"—Cowper.

*l. 65.* **Causeys**—Causeways; raised roads across low or wet places or marshy lands. **Aqueducts**—stone or brick-built artificial water channels for conveyance of drinking water in ancient towns. **Then**—i.e., as a crowning glory. *l. 66.* **His men**—large mass of busy population the whole visible scene teeming with them.



*l.* 67 **When I do come**—in this turret, now broken and deserted, I (the rustic) am going to meet my beloved, who is waiting there for me. **She will I speak-not**—so overcome with the tender emotion of love she is, that when I, her lover, meet her there she stands speechless. *ll.* 68-69. **Either hand ... shoulder**—leaning gently on me with both her hands placed on my shoulders. *l.* 69-70 **Give her ... my face**—before embracing me, who will gaze deep, into my face, there by seeming to embrace my face with her look. Cf.

‘Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine.’—Ben Jonson

*l.* 71. **Ere**—before. **Rush**—fall upon each other in a passionate embrace. **Extinguish**—smother; press down. **Extinguish ... speech**—by close emgrance and passionate kissing press down all speaking. Seeing and speaking will be lost in embracing. *l.* 72. **Each on each each embracing the other.**

*Expl.* But the looked ..... the men (*l.* 61-65). In *Love among the Ruins* Browning describes a broken turret standing still in the midst of the vast pastureland. It is the sole remnant of a once lofty building with a loftier tower from where the king of the land proudly surveyed his prosperous territory. From that turret a rustic's beloved girl now looks out for the approach of her lover in the evening time. But in those far-off days the king looked about all aroud to see his vast kingdom as far as his eyes could reach. He was glad to survey the distant mountains with temples on their tops built to the gods of the people, rows of stately columns built as monuments in the open spaces of the wood, raised roads across low-lying marshes, bridges spanning rivers, channels for conveyance of water and, most of all, the teeming population for whose benefit all these were made.

*St.* 7. *Soldiers were sent out for conquests. But glories and triumphs of the past are nothing to love.*

*St.* 7. *Summary* The people of that kingdom were so powerful and wealthy that they sent out vast armies in all directions; conquering other nations they built a brazen monument in honour of their gods. They still had large reserves of forces and large stock of gold. But it is horrible to think how the earth suffered through the ages for such sinful bloodshed. It is better to turn our thoughts away from such vain triumphs and glories and fix them on love which is the best to possess.



*l.* 73. **One year**—at a particularly prosperous time of the kingdom. **N. B.** All this is Browning's imagination: he imports the real, definite and concrete only to be effective in raising the picture of the power and haughtiness of the nation. There is no historical reference to any real incident nor to any real town. **They**—the nation whose city it was. **A million fighters**—that is, a very large army. **Forth-out** *l.* 74 **South and North**—in all directions; 'south' and 'north' as directions are particularly realistic of the peninsula of Italy. It being narrow in the east and the west expansion of an Italian Kingdom must necessarily be north and south.

*l.* 75. **They**—the people, i.e. their king. **Built . pillar**—erected a high pillar of bronze in honour of their gods out of gratitude to their favour in giving the conquests over their neighbouring kings. The pillar was set up as a memorial of victory, usually dedicated to the gods, after the return of the victorious army that had been 'set out South and North'. *ll.* 77. **Yet reserved**—the nation was so rich and powerful that after sending out a million fighter's, they had a large number of war chariots in reserve. **In Full force**—i. e., with sufficient contingent of fighters to go out on those chariots for further conquests. *l.* 78. **Gold of course**—and, of course, they had plenty of gold in the national treasury to pay these fighters and equip them.

*l.* 79. **Ohm heart !** what a pity it is. **Blood that freezes**—blood that seems to turn cold in the heart in horror as one contemplates the waste of life and energy. **Blood that burns**—blood that seems to take fire in anger. See Expl. below. *l.* 80. **Earth's returns**—what the earth gets in return ; what misery, pain, etc., are inflicted on the earth *l.* 81. **For**—in exchange for. **Whole centuries**—long ages. **Folly**—foolish warfare, oppression, destruction, waste, pursued, by kings and nations. **Noise**—tumult and peacelessness. **Sin**—sinful acts. *ll.* 80-81 **Earth's returns...and sin**—what great sufferings and miseries does the world suffer in consequence of age-long, wicked ambitions of nations and their kings, leading them to foolish warfare, stupid uproar of self-acclamation and many other sinful deeds. Kings and nations pass away, but the earth is worse for the results of their heartless pursuit of glory and power. *l.* 82. **Shut them in**—let us shut all these dreadful things from our view. Let these wicked, stupid things be removed from our



mind—they are so painful to consider. *l.* 83. **Triumphs**—victories. **And the rest**—and all other so-called great things that mighty kings and powerful nations achieved in their time. They came like whirlwinds, broke the world, structured and fretted their tiny hours and disappeared. *l.* 84. Love is best of all the passions that sway the human heart love is the noblest and purest.

*Expl.* Oh, heart ! Oh, blood ..is best (*ll.* 79–84). This is how Browning concludes his dramatic lyric *Love among the Ruins*. He describes the splendour, glory, power etc., of a nation which had its capital on the Roman Campagna. But it is now a long stretch of peaceful, green pasture-land. The nation in its pride and ambition had sent out large armies of conquest, devastated lands and people, built a pillar in honour of their victory-giving gods, had plenty of soldiers and gold, and thought they lived their lives indeed. But they with all their mighty achievements are gone ; the city is in such ruins that it cannot be traced now. Only in a broken turret of the once glorious city, a girl is eargerly waiting for her lover in the twilight of the evening. This leads to the reflection that the earth has suffered greatly through the ages for man's wicked ambition ; warfare, devastation, man-slaughter, mighty havoc and awful turmoil, and other sinful acts have inflicted untold misery on the earth. All this makes one's heart feel pity for deluded humanity. It makes one's blood turn cold in disgust ; it makes the blood burn in indignation. They abhors the very thought of it. It is better to turn the mind away from such stories of human woes inflicted by human amition for victory and glory and all that. It is far better to contemplate love. Love is the purest and noblest of human passions ; it has a permanent value, giving peace and joy to the Universal heart of man from generation to generation.

## 17. BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

The Argument of the Poem has been given before.

The figure of Blougram, no less than his discourse, was virtually new in Browning, and could have come from him at no earlier time. He is fores-hadowed, no doubt by a series of those accomplished mundane ecclesiastics whom Browning at all times drew with so keen a zest,—by Ognibe, the bishop in *Pippa Passes*, the bishop of St. Praxed's. But mundane as he is, he



bears the mark of that sense of the urgency of Christian problem which since Christmas-Eve and Easterday had so largely and variously coloured Browning's work. It occurred to none of those worldly bishops to justify their worldliness, it was far too deeply ingrained for that. But Blougram's brilliant defence, enormously disproportioned as it is to the insignificance of the attack, marks his tacit recognition of loftier ideals than he professes. Like Cleon, he bears involuntary witness to what he repudiates.

But there is much more in Blougram than this. The imposing personality of wiseman contained much to attract and conciliate a poet like Browning, whose visionary idealism went along with so unaffected a relish for the world and the talents which succeeded there. A great spiritual ruler, performing with congenial ease the enormous and varied functions of his office, and with intellectual resources, when they were discharged, to win distinction in scholarship, at chess, in society, appealed powerfully to Browning's congenital delight in all strong and vivid life. He was a great athlete, who had completely mastered his circumstances and shaped his life to his will, opposed to a man of this varied and brilliant achievement, an ineffectual dilettante appeared a sorry creature enough ; and Browning, far from taking his part and putting in his craven mouth the burning retorts which the reader in vain expects, makes him play helplessly with olive-stones while the great bishop rolls him out his mind, and then, as one cured and confuted, betake himself to the life of humbler practical activity and social service.

It is plain that the actual Blougram offered tempting points of contact with that strenuous ideal of life which he was later to preach through the lips of "Rabbi ben Ezra." Even what was most problematic in him, his apparently sincere profession of an outworn creed, suggested the difficult feat of a gymnast balancing on a narrow edge, or forcibly holding his unbelief in check,—

"Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot  
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe."

But Browning marks clearly the element both of self-deception and deliberate masquerade in Blougram's defence. He made him "say right things and call them by wrong names". The intellectual athlete in him went out to the intellectual athlete in



the other, and rejoiced in every education he seemed to establish. He played, and made Blougram play upon the elusive resemblance between the calm of effortless mastery and that of hardly won control.

There is no doubt that Browning based this character study upon Cardinal Wiseman and he maintained, as Gavan Duffy reports, that his treatment of his model was generous. Though this cannot be easily admitted from any impartial standpoint, still we can see how the poetry with his zest for all forms of activity, would be attracted by a figure of so many and brilliant gifts, literary, social controversial and administrative. (Wiseman re-established the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England in the teeth of much opposition in the year 1850). The urbanity of the cardinal may be judged from the fact that he wrote a review (Jan. 1856, *The Rambler*) acknowledging the brilliance of the poem and deploring only the subversive influence it might be expected to exercise upon the Christian faith. An analysis of the poem is given in the succeeding notes; here it is only necessary to call attention to the confidential after-dinner atmosphere, the luxurious surroundings, the flavour of subtle talk which pervades the blank verse and invests its polemics with all the ease and lucidity of prose, and the astonishing mental agility of the poem. This may be best seen in the clear expression of the successive reflections and refractions of the truth. First, the Bishop is defending an untenable position (lines 1002-1004). Secondly, he is not actually in the position which he defends (lines 346-347). Thirdly, the case against him is so feebly superficially put by Gigadibs that his reply is nothing but gymnastic trifling. Fourthly, there are moments of unquestioned sincerity in the discussion, not of unbelief, but of doubt. And lastly, while doubt is defended earnestly, the case for faith put upon comparatively base and specious grounds. The threads of sophistry and truth are so subtly interwoven, that Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Mr. By-ends, Mr. Facing both ways, the Christian himself might each appropriate a section of this astounding Apology. The student might find another interest in determining how much of it is actually poetry.

4. **Basilicas**—Originally a large oblong hall with double colonades, and an apse, used as a place of public assembly. Later the word was used to describe churches generally; in



Rome the seven churches founded by Constantine are distinctively called basilicas.

6. **Brother Pugin's** (1812-1852)—Early became a Roman Catholic, and designed many Catholic churches in the Gothic style. Practically all the decorative design of the House of Commons is due to him.

45. **Che Che.**—A mere exclamation, meaning "What !"

49-85. **Gigadibs** puts the case for the direct outspoken truth, the "grand simple life", he calls it.

52. **Goethe** (1749-1832)—The German scientist, Philosopher, critic and poet; the greatest mind of his century.

54. **Count D' Orsay.** (1798-1852)—"A celebrated leader of society in Paris and London, who added to the attractions of dandyism those of high intellectual and artistic gifts."

86-143. The Bishop's reply is on lines of common sense; we must conform to our present environment. If we have ideals that are unseaworthy they must be jettisoned.

108 **Balzac's novels.** (1799-1850)—Balzac gathered his novels together in *La Comedie Humaine*, which was much admired by Browning. In the multitude and vitality of his creations of character he is surpassed only by Shakespeare.

113. **Parma's pride, the jerome.**—In the Pinacotheca at Parma is the *Virgin and Child with St. Jerome*, painted by Correggio.

114. **Correggio.** He is the "marvellous Modenese," having been born at Modena in 1494. See *A face*, line 14-16 and note.

150-340. For the purpose of debate they agree upon abandoning Dogma; then in three different lines of argument the Bishop shows the uselessness of this step. First (lines 173-212), entire unbelief is non-existent; emotions, intuitions and memories may at any moment fret the string we had resolved should never vibrate. Second (Lines 221-270), we cannot put belief and unbelief upon an equal footing; for belief implies activity, which is the principle of waking life. Unbelief implies inactivity and sleep. The man without faith labels himself as bed-ridden. Third (lines 270-340), once we admit the superiority of belief it is important to emphasise it before the world. Hence he pronounces himself of the Roman Catholic faith, and in reward receives dignity, comfort and success.



160. **The ugly consequence**—That he is proved a hypocrite.

184. **Eripides**—Such for instance as this from the end of the *Bacchae* (Prof. Gilbert Murray's trans.);

“There be many shapes of mystery  
And many things God makes to be,  
Past hope or fear.  
And the end men looked for cometh not,  
And a path is there where no man thought.  
So hath is fallen here”

316-320. Peter's creed, or, rather, Hildebrand's Hildebrand took the name of Pope Gregory VII. He was for long at enmity with the Emperor Henry IV., but his firmness of attitude and his skilful diplomacy largely increased the temporal power of the Papacy. He cleansed the Church of its besetting evils, simony and clerical incontinence; in fact he, to all intents, founded the mediaeval Papacy in theory and practice.

345-431. Here Blougram meets the accusation that the attainment of rank and dighity can only be called success because his motives and standards are low. His replies are either evasions or sophistries. First (lines 340-361), he says in effect, if he is a man of low standards then he will at least make the best of his case in the way of comfort. Secondly (lines 362-430), he shows how mistaken Gigadibs is in supposing that the dozen men of sense out of the million of the common herd are likely to pronounce him forthwith either fool or knave. Having refined and discriminating judgments, they will not pass these dogmatic sentences; they know there are a thousand alternative shades between fool and knave. Moreover his acknowledged learning and prominent office makes him above all contempt in professing his belief. He becomes thereby one of those whose paradoxical characters exalt them to the “dangerous edge of things” where they challenge the notice of the universe.

377. **the last winking Virgin**.—Used generally for the impositions which Gigadibs accuses the Roman Catholic Church of practising upon its simple adherents.

381. **Verdi** (1813-1901)—There was a time between 1844 and 1851 when all the operas Verdi composed proved failures. But after *Rigoletto* (1851), he entered upon a scarcely interrupted period of success.



386. **Rossini.** (1792-1868)—He is best remembered by his operas, *Il Barbiere di Seviglia* (1816), and *Gullaume Tell* (1829).

395. Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.—This was a tendency in Browning which markedly increased in his later works. *The Ring and the Book*, *Fifine at the Fair*, *Red Cotton Night Cap Country*, and the *Inn Album*, are all of them studies of crime and moral distortion.

407. Your picked Twelve—etc. These "Prime men who appraise their kind" would have not a moment's difficulty in explaining how Blougram could at the same time believe and disbelieve.

411. Schelling's way—Schelling (1775-1854) in his doctrine of Identity, held that the real and the Ideal, the physical and the spiritual are identical in the absolute, of which they are but manifestations. On such a theory it is manifestly possible to do many feats of simultaneous belief and disbelief.

432-554. There is a subtle turn in the argument here by which Blougram begins to be the apologist, not for himself as an unbelieving bishop, but for the recognition of some kind of faith. He invites Gigadibs to exemplify his ideal of the great man without faith. Shall it be Napoleon? If Napoleon were in truth without any belief and aim beyond his immediate activities, how inhuman and how paltry his achievements were. Shall it be Shakespeare? True, he could imagine a universe, yet he sought not imaginary towers and palaces, but the possession of "the trimmest house in Stratford town". "If this life's all," then Blougram who keeps his semi-royal state clearly "wins the game".

466. "The State, that's "The phrase" The phrase "L'etat c'est moi !" was originally used by Louis quatorze.

472. **An Austrian marriage**—Napoleon married Marie Louise, daughter of the Emperor of Austria, soon after the battle of Austerlitz.

475. **Austerlitz.** (1805) In this battle Napoleon defeated the army of the Coalition of Austria, Russia and England.

513. **His towers and gorgeous places.** Compare the *Tempest*, IV. i. 151 :

"And, like the beaseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,



The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind."

514. The trimmest house in Stratford town. On May 4th, 1597, Shakespeare purchased New Place, the largest house in Stratford, for £ 60 (that is, nearly £ 500 in our money).

516. Giulio Romano's pictures—See *The Winter's Tale*, V. ii. 90 : "piece" (the statue of Hermione) "many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master, Julio Romano . ." He lived from 1492 to 1546.

Dowland's Flute—In the *passionate Pilgrim*, which was published with Shakespeare's name on the title-page, is a sonnet on music and poetry in which these lines occur :

"Dowland to thee is dear, whose heavenly touch  
Upon the lute doth ravish human sense."

The sonnet is now known however to be not by Shakespeare, but by his contemporary, Richard Barnfield. Dowland was a skilled lutanist and composer, who after travelling in Italy published his *First Book of Songs and Aires* in 1597.

519. "Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal"—The legate from Pope Innocent to King John in Shakespeare's play. See *King John*, III. i. 138.

533. Terni.—Terni is about forty miles north of Rome ; the water-fall is of rare natural beauty. Byron describes it in *Childe Harold*, canto, IV. stanzas 69-71.

553. The cousin of Queen Bess.—Blougram for an instant supposes both Shakespeare and himself to be living in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Their rewards are then : Shakespeare to win his house at Stratford, Blougram to attain such office as to stand within the immediate circle of the monarch. "Coz" was a term of familiar address in Elizabeth's time.

555-591. Taking it for granted then that some form of faith is essential, the Bishop adds a corollary, that it must be enthusiastic. If we do not accept the enthusiasm of Luther with its dynamic power, we fall back upon the chill negations of Strauss, with the bare chance that they may be not only cold but wrong.



577. **Strauss**—(1808-1874) His rationalistic *Life of Jesus* was translated into English by George Eliot in 1846. In his last book, *The Old and the new Thought*, his conclusions, were, briefly, that Christianity was practically dead, that there was no conscious or personal God, and that a new faith must be built up out of art and the scientific ready of nature.

585. **It could not owe a farthing.** Suppose I should release them from all claim upon their purses by the Church : is it to be thought of that they would insist upon paying still ?

599-764. By another of the swift modulations which make the poem so actual, it develops into a sincere and eloquent defence of doubt. First (line 599-646), he insists that faith with doubt is not only sufficient, but there is no other possible form of it. The mere wish that Christianity should be true avails to exalt a man from indifference to belief. Secondly (lines 647-675), an absolute faith is inconceivable ; time and earth are designed by God to conceal Himself least we should be struck blind with excess of light. Faith needs to be perpetually stimulated by the menace of unbelief. A parenthesis follows (lines 676-692), showing that even in the Middle Ages of unquestioning faith, belief in future punishment and reward was not sufficient to ensure correct moral conduct. Thirdly (lines 693-712), he resumes the apology for doubt, and demands impossibilities for faith to exercise itself upon. Fourthly (lines 724-764), he replies to Gigadibs' request to delete some of the grosser tenets in his profession. He will not abandon a single miracle, recognising that where one goes all must sooner or later follow.

617. **Against the thing done to me underground, etc.**—It is a matter of indifference who or what may have composed a man's soul : the question is, having that soul, what has been achieved ?

644. **But would I rather, etc.**—He would rather a man should be puzzled by contradictions than discover the truth and treat it as a thing of no importance (Wiseman was actually born in Seville.)

654. **What all the blessed Evil's for**—Compare Abt Vogler, lines 83 and 84.

664. **Ichors O'er the place**—The word is not given as a verb in the N. E. D. Pathologically ichor is a watery issue from a



wound. Here it appears to convey some sense of healing as well.

667. Like the snake 'neath Michael's foot. There is a picture by Rafael, in the Louvre, of St Michael slaying the dragon ; and most Roman Catholic churches contain a painting on the subject.

703. If the Church bid thm. To the Roman Catholic, the Church, the Pope being its voice, is the supreme authority not only in faith, but in every aspect of life.

**Brother Newman.** (1801-1890)—A leader of the Tractarian movement in the middle of the nineteenth century. After writing tract XC. the Bishop of Oxford called upon him to cease the production of these pamphlets ; Newman then passed over to the Roman Church in 1845. In a long debate with Kingsley, and in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, and in many other writings, especially his sermons, he proved himself one of the powerful and subtle controversialists and one of the most gifted prose-writers in English.

704. the immaculate conception—The doctrine that the Virgin Mary was born free from the taint of original sin ; in 1854 this was declared to be an article of faith of the Roman Catholic Church.

707. It can't be, etc.—*Credo quia impossibile est*, I believe because it is impossible (tertullian). Compare Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* : "I love to lose myself in a mystery, to pursue my Reason to an *O altitudo*".

715. **King Bomba**—Ferdinand II, king of the two Sicilies, 1830-1859. The word means, "bragging liar". He got his name through his unjustifiable bombardment of Messina.

**Lazaroni.** Beggars in Naples, so called from lazarus because they exhibit their deformities to excite public sympathy.

716. **Antonelli.**—Cardinal Antonelli was the astute and diplomatic secretary of Pope Pious IX.

720. The ignorant beggar can see that to defy natural laws is to invoke an immediate penalty ; but he has wit enough to see that moral laws may be broken without any immediate danger, in spite of all the Church may say.

728. **The Naples' Liquefaction**—In the cathedral at Naples is preserved a small quantity of the blood of St. Januarius, a



martyr of the fourth century. On the feastday of the Saint, September 19th, this blood is brought in a crystal vessel near to the head of the Saint, before the whole congregation, when it liquefies and flows to one side. As the liquefaction proceeds rapidly or tardily the people judge that it will go well or ill with their harvests in the succeeding season.

744. **Fichte's clever cut**—Fichte taught that each temporal limited self, such as we imagine ourselves to be, is a creative ego imposing limitations upon itself in order to transcend them. When all these limitations are overpassed we arrive at a universal self, in which we all partake, and this is God.

764-970. Here the apologist returns to his own case. In lines 781-806 he ridicules the premature preparation for the next world which sacrifices any of the amenities of the present. In lines 807-853 he attacks the inconsistency of Gigadibs. Since all revealed religion is a myth, why does he not take every satisfaction that life can give on that basis? It is because he is held in check by some instinct and intuition, and so it appears he is a slave and hypocrite, not daring any more than Blougram to follow reason unreservedly. To Gigadibs' reply that he refrains in consideration of his fellow-men, the Bishop responds (lines 854-870) with a pointed comparison of what each receives and social estimation.

877. "Pastor est tui Dominus." "God is your shepherd", with the implied suggestion that he acknowledges no priest in this office.

924. **On music, poetry, the fictile vase etc.** Wiseman was an able and voluminous writer and lecturer on Art, Science and Religion. The poet names these as suggestive examples. Fictile means plastic, and hence is often used for earthenware. Albano is some five miles south of Rome. Anacreon was a Greek poet of the sixth century B. C. His convivial and erotic lyrics were frequently translated and imitated by English poets of the seventeenth century.

957. **In Dublin**—Wiseman with some others founded the Dublin Review in 1836.

972. **In partibus etc.**—Before 1850, when the Roman Catholic hierarchy was restored in England, a bishop exercised his functions here but drew his title from some consecrated see elsewhere. He was *episcopus in partibus infidelium*.



Wiseman, for instance, was consecrated bishop of Melipotamus in 1840.

Though rooted in contemporary controversy and speculation, the subject has a universality which gives the attitudes and views of Blougram and Gigadibs a modern significance, Gigadibs is the materialistic sceptic, and Blougram, the materialistic 'believer' who has no difficulty in defeating his opponent rationally, step by step, with frequent irony and a superficiality which is inevitable simply because he chooses to debate on his contestant's own intellectual level.

I. 4. **basilicas**—The word is commonly used by Catholics for 'churches'.

I. 6. **Pugin**—A Catholic architect (1812-52).

I. 34. **Corpus Christi Day**—The Thursday after Trinity Sunday, when celebrations in honour of the Eucharist are observed by the Church.

I. 48. It is my turn (to play), and yours to listen as I did.

II. 52-4. **Three famous people**—Goethe, a great intellectual; Napoleon, soldier and emperor; Count D'Orsay, dandy.

I. 108. **Balzac**—A great French realistic Novelist (1799-1850).

I. 113. The picture of St. Jerome was painted by Correggio, who was born at Parma.

I. 117. **Modenese**—Correggio is thought to have studied at Modena.

I. 184. **Euripides**—A writer of numerous Greek tragedies (480-406 B. C.)

I. 197. That is, the Christian interpretation; of John XIV. 6.

I. 315. Cf. the first temptation of Jesus, Matthew. iv. 3-4.

I. 316. **Hildebrand**—As Pope Gregory VII, he reformed the Catholic Church.

I. 381 ff. **Verdi**—The story goes that while the audience was applauding one of his operas, Verdi glanced at Rossini (a successful operatic composer, 1792-1868) and knew it was a failure.



- l.* 407. **Picked twelve**—Cf. line. 374 ff.
- l.* 411. **Schelling**—A German philosopher (1775-1854).
- l.* 466. The expression 'L' Etat c'est moi was used by Louis XIV.
- l.* 472. Napoleon married Marie Louise of Austria.
- l.* 475. **Austerlitz** : A battle in which Napoleon defeated the Austrian and Russian forces (1805).
- l.* 513. **towers and gorgeous palaces** : From *The Tempest*.
- l.* 516. **Giulio Romano** : A pupil of Raphael, and famous as a painter and sculptor, 1492-1546 ; mentioned in *The Winter's Tale*.
- Dowland** : An Elizabethan composer of 'Songs and Aires'.
- l.* 554. Blougram imagines that, had he been Shakespeare's contemporary, he would have been on friendly terms with Queen Elizabeth. 'Cousin' or 'Coz' was an Elizabethan form of addressing a friend.
- l.* 577. **Strauss**—His rationalist *Life of Jesus* was translated into English by 'George Eliot' the novelist. Strauss rejected everything miraculous, including the Resurrection.
- l.* 664. **ichors**—The watery issue from a wound, which heals or 'case-hardens'.
- l.* 667. Alludes to the punishment of Satan after the fall ; cf. *Revelation*, xii. 7-10.
- l.* 703. **Newman**—Cardinal Newman (1801-90), leader of the Tractarian (High Church) movement in England. He became a Catholic in 1845, and Sophistically justified such 'miracles' as the movement of the Madonna's eyes in pictures (*l.* 699) and the Januarius liquefaction (*l.* 728).
- l.* 704. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was declared an article of faith in the Catholic Church in 1854.
- l.* 715. **Bomba**—A term of opprobrium for Ferdinand II of Naples.
- l.* 716. **Antonelli**—The Pope's Secretary.
- l.* 728. **Naples liquefaction**—The dry blood of the martyr St. Januarius, preserved in the cathedral at Naples, is supposed to liquefy on his feast-day, 19 September.
- l.* 744. **Fichte**—A German philosopher (1797-1879) whose transcendental philosophy assumed that the souls of all living



beings constituted one Soul, which is God.

*l.* 780ff. The beliefs hazarded by Tennyson in *In Memoriam* are turned to suit the argument Cf. 'Old Pictures in Florence', 161ff.

*ll.* 876-7. 'You do not need the Church ; the Lord is your shepherd'.

*l.* 915. **Albano**—South of Rome. **Anacreon**—A Greek, famous for his poems on love and wine.

*l.* 947. Browning alludes satirically to the heavy analytical studies of Shakespeare by contemporary German scholars.

*ll.* 972-4. Before 1850, when the Roman Catholic 'hierarchy' was restored in England a Catholic bishop took his title from a 'heathen' Courty : he was *Episcopus in partibus infidelium* (Cf. the introductory note).

*ll.* 976-8. *Gigadibs* is nervous, while the bishop plays his cat-and-mouse game.

*l.* 1014. **St. John**—This gospel shows the revelation of God's love to man through Christ ; cf. 'Saul, xviii.

## 18. PICTOR IGNOTUS

Art was far from being as strange to the Browning of 1842-45 as love. But he seized with a peculiar predilection those types and phases of the Art-world with which love has least to do. He studies the egoisms of artists, the vanities of connoisseurs ; the painter *lutwyche* showing "how he can hate" ; the bishop of *St Praxed's* piteously bargaining on his death-bed for the jasper and *lapislazuli* "which *Gandolph* shall not choose but see and burst", the duke of the *Last Duchess* displaying his wife's portrait as the wonder of his gallery, and unconcernedly disposing of her person. In a single poem only Browning touches those problems of the artist life which were to occupy him in the 'Fifties ; and the *Pictor Ignotus* is as far behind the *Andrea del Sarto* and *Fra Lippo Lippi* in intellectual force as in dramatic brilliance and plasticity. Browning's sanguine and energetic temperment always inclined him so overemphasis, and he has somewhat over-emphasised the anaemia of this anaemic soul. Rarely again did he paint in such resolute uniformity of ashen grey. The "*Pictor*" is the earliest, and the palest, of Browning's pale ascetics, who make, in one way or another, the great refusal, and lose their souls by trying to save them in a barrenness which they call purity.



The musician as such holds at this stage an even smaller place in Browning's art than the painter. None of these Lyrics foreshadows *Abt Vogler* and *Hugues of Saxe-Gotha* as the Pictor foreshadows *Lippi* and *Del Sarto*.

Of pointing he wrote in *Pictor Ignotus*, Old pictures in Florence, *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea Del Sarto* and some other poems ; but it is in those named that he entered most into the artist's point of view, showing how the artist works and still more how he feels. It is noticeable that he did not interpret the greatest masters but obscure works like *Pictor Ignotus*, or such as have risen only to the Second rank, as *Andrea*, or have salient qualities of temperament, like *Fra Lippo* and *Andrea* again. Browning had a most human tolerance and leniency for what misses supreme attainment. It is essential to his creed. *Pictor Ignotus* and *Andrea* and studies of failure in painting ; each of them as aware of a loftier ideal, but the causes of failure to realise it differ in the two cases. The unknown painter is timed and technically unaccomplished and sinks acquiescingly into oblivion. *Del Sarto* is the faultless painter and has had visitings of ambition to vie with *Leonardo* and *Michael Angelo* ; but he has a soul too shrivelled and impotent to inspire his icily perfect drawing.

## 19. THE YEAR'S AT THE SPRING

Robert Browning (1812-89), one of the greatest of English poets, treated of every side of human life in his verse ; his style is often rough and his meaning in places obscure, but he had a deep knowledge of humanity and a firm belief in the ultimate good purpose of the universe. His longest and greatest poem is *The Ring and the Book* though it is also probably one of the least read, owing to its length and difficulty. His shorter pieces were mostly published in eight thin paper-backed books, appearing 1841-6, to which he gave the fanciful name *Bells and Pomegranates*, taken from the ornaments on the hem of the high-priest's robe, see Exodus, xxxix, 24-6. Browning says that by this name he meant to indicate 'an alternation, or mixture, of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought.'

This song is the first of Pippa's four songs in *Pippa Passes* which form the first of those numbers.



## 20. TRANSCENDENTALISM

The poem is a monologue in which Browning proffers advice to a younger poet, who has accepted the view that poetry must be philosophical and has written presumably, a long hazy transcendental poem in twelve books. The true poet deals with real life (cf. 'How it Strikes a Contemporary'), and his thought is best conveyed in the concrete terms of life. This may be illustrated from many of the poems in *Men and Women*; e. g. 'The Last Ride Together', 'How it Strikes a Contemporary', 'Childe Roland', 'Andrea del Sarto', or 'Protus' (where reflections are raised but never expressed directly). Critics, from Sidney onwards, have in fact argued that poetry is the most philosophical of languages because it can express the universally true in a particular situation or collocation of imagery. There is not a single direct or literal statement in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and yet it expresses a view of a whole civilization.

Browning's poems are often thought to be more difficult than they really are because the illustrations are drawn from recondite sources. In this poem, for example, the meaning would be more apparent if more were commonly known of Boehme and John of Halberstad.

Browning says the object of poetry is the presentation of life in concrete terms. He illustrates by a single example, the treatment of flowers—in particular, the rose (a favourite image with him, to judge by other poems in *Men and Women*) Does one learn more about them from reading heavy treatises like Boehme's (where, as it happens, the flowers do come to life and excite 'wonder' at one point in a 'tough book') or from the sudden revelation of the rose by a magician? The poetry is in the revelation (the 'look you !').

Once again we are reminded of what Browning says in 'The Last Ride Together' and 'Cleon,' that life is greater than art. The greatest poetry achieved by the young poet is the actuality, the picture of him looking heavenwards over his harp instead of speaking 'dry words across its strings'. In this detail, as in so many others, Browning expresses thoughts in a memorable way through a picture. All that is positive in this poem has a significance which may be illustrated from his poetry in general.

1. 22. Swedish Boehme—(later corrected to 'German mystic writer Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) professed that he could



reveal all mysteries by the study of nature, and wrote at great length on the subject.

l. 37. **Mage Like him of Halberstadt**—Another German, a magician of the medieval school, who by alchemy could produce as by *hey presto* the most beautiful roses to order. It is not clear what authority Browning had for attributing this power to John of Halberstadt.

## 21. HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

This poem is related to '*Fra Lippo Lippi*' and, indirectly, to 'Transcendentalism. In typically bizarre and challenging (almost ironical) Illustration, Browning presents the poet as pre-eminently a student of life, of people rather than of nature all in relation God :

'For I'—so I spoke—'am a poet :  
Human nature—behoves that I know It !

The germinal thought, as De Vane points out, may well have come from the lines in *King Lear*—

And take upon's the mystery of things  
As if we were God's spies.....

The conception of life is Shelleyan, as in *The Ring and the Book* only glimmerings of truth are to be seen in this world (ll. 104-6).

l. 3. **Valladolid**—In Spain.

l. 27. Cf. the graphic account of the finding of *The Old Yellow Book* in Florence (opening of *The Ring and the Book*).

l. 44. Cf. the introductory note.

l. 104 ff. The true poet is a 'soldier-saint' ('The statue and the Bust', l. 222), as the Pope regards Caponsacchi or as Browning, his Grammarian). Cf. Browning to Ruskin : 'A poet's affair is with God, to whom he is accountable, and of whom is his reward.'

l. 115. **Prado**—The fashionable street where pleasure seekers throng (like the Prado in Madrid).



## 22. AN EPISTLE OF KARSHISH

The visionary scene of his first meeting with Karshish, though altogether Browningsque in detail, is Wordsworthian in its mysterious effect upon personality :

‘I crossed a ridge of short, sharp, broken hills  
Like an old lion’s cheek teeth. Out there came  
A moon made like a face with certain spots  
Multiform, manifold and menacing :  
Then a wind rose behind me.’

A less formidable problem is handled in the companion study of *Cleon*. The Greek mind fascinated Browning, though most of his renderings of it have the savour of a salt not gathered in Attica, and his choice to types shows a strong personal bias. From the heroic and majestic elder art of Greece he turns with pronounced preference to Euripes the human and the positive, with his facile and versatile intellect, his agile criticism, and his “warm tears”. It is somewhat along these lines that he has conceived his Greek poet of the days of Karshish, confronted, like the Arab doctor, with the “new thing”. As Karshish is at heart a spiritual idealist, for all his preoccupation with drugs and stones, so Cleon, a past-master of poetry and painting, is among the most positive and worldly-wise of men. He looks back over a life scored with literary triumphs, as Karshish over his crumbs of learning gathered at the cost of blows and obloquy. But while Karshish has the true scholar’s dispassionate and self-effacing thirst for knowledge, Cleon measures his achievements with the insight of an epicurean artist. He gathers in luxuriously the incense of universal applause, his songs rising from every fishing-back at nightfall,—and wistfully contrasts the vast range of delights, which as an artist he imagines, with the limited pleasures which as a man he enjoys. The magnificent symmetry, the rounded completeness of his life, suffer a serious deduction here, and his Greek sense of harmony suffers offence as well as his human hunger for joy. He is a thorough realist, and finds no satisfaction in contemplating what he may not possess. Art itself suffers disparagement, as heightening this vain capacity of contemplation.—

“I know the joy of kingship : well, thou art king !”

With great ingenuity this Greek realism is made the stepping-stone to a conception of immortality as un-Greek as that of the



Incarnation is un-semitic. Karshish shrank intuitively from a conception which fascinated while it awed ; to Cleon a future state in which joy and capability will be brought again to equality seems a most plausible supposition, which he only rejects with a sigh for lack of outer evidence :—

“Zeus has not yet revealed it ; and alas,  
He must have done so, were it possible !”

The little vignette in the opening lines finely symbolises the brilliant Greek decadence, as does the closing picture in Karshish the mystic dawn of the earth. Here the portico, flooded with the glory of a sun about to set, profusely heaped with treasures of art ; there the naked uplands of Palestine, and the moon rising over jagged hills in a wind-swept sky.

Here Browning sets forth, not as in Blougram and Caliban the ambiguities of truth itself in an unfamiliar and arresting light. It is mirrored in the mind of Karshish the Arab physician by whose two prepossessions it is for a moment amiably distorted. For, first, he is an Arab, and therefore almost impervious to this conception of the incarnation. (It should be noted however that the common element of the Arabic and the Christian belief, the unity of God, makes the transition at the close more credible and natural). And, secondly, being a physician, he diagnoses the case in familiar terms and endeavours to range it finally under a well-known category ; it is “a case of mania subinduced by epilepsy.” Through both these obstacles the light breaks, though it is only a light reflected in the resurrected features of a Jewish artisan ; its glow irradiates the traveller’s mind so that he is driven to the almost involuntary confession of his postscript.

The broad historical background is a lawless Judea is perpetual dead of the legions of Vespasian. The foreground is the village of Bethany, beneath a rocky spur of Mount Olivet, the scene 35 years earlier of the miracle recorded in St. John, ch. XI just preceding the events in which the Nazarene leech “perished in a tumult”. Here the two are confronted ; Karshish alert, observant, rather tolerant for his time novel ideas ; noting the prevalence of Syrian diseases, the fertility of the country in herbs useful to the pharmacist, and keenly interested professionally in this case which only partially submits to any known



classification. On the other side is Lazarus, physically refreshed, mentally an inhabitant of some other province of experience. In fact he has seen "the great ring of pure and endless light," and and is bewildered on his return by this confinement within earthly and temporal restrictions. In no poem, even of Browning's is the distribution of detail so cunning and so appropriate, nor the cumulative effect both of picture and of thought so rich and so convincing.

5. **To coop up**, etc.—Compare Rabbi Ben Ezra, stanzas viii, and xi.

11. **The wily vapour**—That is the "puff of vapour", man's soul; Karshish believes in its pre-existence.

17. **True snake-stone**—A small rounded piece of stone popularly supposed to cure snake-bite. No stone having this power actually exists, and the physician seems to suggest, in line 19, that he is rather dubious of the medical efficacy of the specimens he sends.

28. **Vespasian**—Vespasian was in charge of the province of Judea from 67 to 69 A. D. In the latter year he became emperor, and left the conduct of the war against Jerusalem to his son Titus, who captured the town in the year 70. The poem refers therefore to a time nearly 40 years after the resurrection of Lazarus.

36. **this Bethany lies scarce the distance**, etc.—Bethany is actually about two miles from Jerusalem.

40. **Void the suffing**, etc.—To set down all the experiences of my journeyings.

42. **Choler**—Bile. The word has also the meaning "anger". Anger was thought to be due to excess of bile in the system. The word is connected with Greek *Xoln*, bile.

43. **Tertians**. Agues or fevers with paroxysms recurring every other day. M. F. tertiane, a tertian ague.

45. **A spider here**, etc.—Dr. Berdoe's note on this is as follows: "Dr. H. McCook, a specialist in spider lore, has explained this passage in *Poet-Lore*, vol. I. P. 518. He says the spider referred to belongs to the wandering rous; they stalk their prey in the open field, or in divers lurking places, and are quite different in their habits from the webspinners. The spider sprinkled with



mottles he thinks is the Zebra spider (*Epiblemum scenicum*). It belongs to the saltigrade tribe”.

49. **The syrian run-a-gate**—Some native whom the physician has cured, in his own way, of the “ailing eye,” and who has volunteered to convey the letter to some point whence its delivery may be counted upon. Run-a-gate is a corrupted form of M. E. renegat, an apostate (from Latin negare, to deny). The corruption was due to a popular etymology from runne a gate, run on the road, hence, to be a vagabond. —(Skeat)

50. **His service payeth me a sublimate**—“This service is what I get in return for the powder with which I healed him”.

55. **Gum-tragacanth**—often known as gum-dragon ; a white mucilage, much used in pharmacy, especially as a solvent.

57. **Porphyry**—Here in the sense of a slab of stone used for grinding and triturating drugs upon. Chaucer already has the word in this sense : “Our grounden litarge eek on the profurie” (Can, Yeo. Tale 222).

59. **Crossing so with leprosy**—He means that he cannot diagnose the case when it is complicated by leprosy.

67. **A tang**—Literally, a strong taste or flavour.

79. **Subinduced by epilepsy**—Brought on by epilepsy.

82. **Exhibition**—The administration of a remedy.

91. **At that vantage**—Having that advantage of being the first remembered impression.

103. **A fume**—At first a vapour rising from the stomach to the brain ; later an unsubstantial figment of the mind.

106. **Saffron**—Once used as a cordial, being supposed to possess stimulant and anti-spasmodic properties.

107. **The after-life**—The remainder of his natural life, not the life after death.

109. **Sanguine**—Full-blooded, muscular and generally healthy. The four humours or habits of body in mediaeval medicine were the sanguine, the phlegmatic, the choleric and the melancholi.

117. **This grown man**—This resumes the sentence interrupted in line 108.

166. **Object**—That is, if you object, ‘tis a word, but a gesture’



177. **Greek fire.**—A combustible composition for setting fire to an enemy's ships, works, etc. ; so called from being first used by the Greeks of Constantinople. Its invention is described in Wanley, book III. ch. xliii & 6.

178. **Some thread of life.....which runs across, etc.**—Mortal life appears to him as no more than a black thread, almost lost sight of in the vast expanse of eternity, the vision of which has shattered his sense of proportion. Still he "Holds firmly to it," that is, he carries through its duties ; but meanwhile he is perpetually distracted by the conflicting claims of the temporal and eternal worlds.

179. **The life to lead perforcedly**—He has no choice but to live thus.

200. **Professdly the faultier**—The more conscious of the evil within.

221. **"How, beast," said I etc.**—There is a robust medical vigour in the probing.

228. **Affects the very brutes, etc.**—This brings to mind the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*. "Our sisters the birds are pleasing God," is his interpretation of the singing of birds. It is in consonance with all Browning's teaching that the one quality of which there is active expression in this man who has prematurely entered spiritual life, should be love.

253. **The loss to Occult learning.**—The physician transfers the significance of this portent in nature from the small Jewish tumult in which a leech perished to the worthier event of the sage who lived in the pyramid alone.

257. **On vain recouse etc**—The report of the last scenes of the life of Christ which has come to the ears of *Karshish* is distorted. None of the Gospels say that the Jews had recourse, vain or otherwise, to Him for help against the earthquake. His "virtues had been "tried" by previous miracles they had seen.

281. **Blue-floering borage, etc.**—A plant yielding a juice formerly much esteemed as a cordial. The ordinary British variety, as well as the Aleppo sort, has blue flowers and a nitrous stem.

304. **The very God.**—The emotion to which this unexpected encounter and its accompanying revelation have given rise, has hitherto been suppressed ; it breaks into fervid utterance in this



postscript, pitched in a very different key from the rest of the poem.

This is really a companion poem to 'Cleon', as 'Fra Lippo Lippi' is to 'Andrea del Sarto', Karshish and Abib are imaginary characters. To an Arab Allah was great but not a God of Love. For the story of Lazarus, see John's gospel, xi. 1-44.

*l.* 17. **snake-stone**—Supposed to cure snake-bite.

*l.* 28. **Vespasian**—Vespasian invaded Palestine and began the siege of Jerusalem in A. D. 69.

*l.* 43. **Tertians**—Fevers which reach a climax every third (or every other) day.

*l.* 45. **a spider**—Spiders were used for many medicines (Pliny).

*l.* 50. **Payeth me a sublimate**—Is in return for a powder (prepared by heating a substance which vaporizes and condenses) I have him.

*l.* 55. **Gum-tragacanth**—A gum prepared from the 'goat-thorn' and used as a solvent in medicine.

*l.* 57. **porphyry**—A reddish rock. Here, either the mortar or stone slab for crushing substances for medicines.

*l.* 108. **Fume**—Literally, vapour, Here, fancy (above).

*ll.* 165-6. **demand...Object**—If you demand.....if you object.

*l.* 177. **Greek fire**—Combustibles first used by the Greeks to burn ships.

*l.* 240. The figurative expression of a medical man ; Cf. *ll.* 50 and 103.

*l.* 252. **the earthquake**—Cf. Matthew, xxvii. 50-3.

*l.* 281. **Borage**—The stem yields a juice which was used as a cordial.

*ll.* 291-2. Cf. 'Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit' (T. S. Eliot : 'The Waste Land') and p. XXI.

*l.* 804ff. Cf. 'Saul', pp. 188-91.

### 23. FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Fra Lippo Lippi (1412-1469) being orphaned very early was taken by his aunt, Monna Lapaccia, to the Carmelite monastery in



Florence, where he remained till 1432. From this date under the patronage of the Medici; he had many commissions, though their prompt execution was interfered with by his love for dissipation and good company. The frescoes at Prats and Spoleto and the Coronation of the Viroin, the conception of which he describes at the end of the poem, are among his chief works. Two delightful lunetics in tempera, the *Seven Saints*, and the Annuciation, are in the National Gallery. The latter bears the badge of the Medici, three feathers held together by a ring.

The main outlines of the story are true and are drawn (as in the case of the other *Florentine artist*, *Andrea del Sarto*) from Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*. Even there, Brother Lippo Lippi figures as what Chaucer would have called "a fish that is waterless." Browning makes him an irrepressible jesting scapegrace—a tonsured Falstaff—with an appetite for the delights of the palate and the senses, and an artist with that inborn leaning towards realism which in such hearty natures turns to genial caricature. He is impatient of the distorting pressure of piety upon art, and equally of any ideal beauty beyond that sensible to the eye, being convinced that this world, if we grasp it with both hands, "means intensely and means good." In the poem he is, characteristically enough, pouring out his beliefs, his escapades, and his ambitions, with a plentiful admixture of irreverence, to the captain of the watch who has apprehended him upon his equivocal night expedition.

7. **The Carmine**—The monastery of the Carmelite Friars. In the cloisters there are still frescoes by Masaccio, the "Hulking Tom" of line 277.

17. **Cosima of the Medici**. (1389-1464.)—A Florentine who returned from exile to make himself astutely master of the whole state, which he rules absolutely, though not nominally so, until his death in 1464. He was a merchant, banker, statesman and a generous patron of art and letters, and after his death was not undeservedly called the Father of his Country.

53. **Flower o' the broom**—These scattered flower-verses are in the form of the Italian folk-songs called stornelli. They consist of three lines. The first, five syllables long, contains the name of a flower and sets the rhyme. Then the love theme is told in two lines of eleven syllables each, rhyming or in assona-



nce with first. The stornelli in the poem are plainly not completed.

67. **Saint Laurence**—One of the oldest churches in Italy. Cosimo de' Medici is buried there, and in the New Sacristy nearby are Michael Angelo's famous Tombs of the Medici.

73. **Jerome.** c. 340-420—The most learned of the fathers of the early church. His Latin translation of the Bible is the basis of the Vulgate. The last 35 years of his life were spent at Bethlehem in the practice of the strictest asceticism and in theological controversy.

84. **Shucks—Husks.**

120. **The droppings of the wax**—The makers of ceremonial candles are always ready to buy them.

120. **The dropping of the wax**—The makers of ceremonial candles are always ready to buy them.

121. **The Eight**—The Signoria, a council of magistrates, holding office for two months at a time.

130. **Antiphonary**—The service-book of the Roman Catholic Church, composed by Gregory the great.

136. **Camaldolese**—A monkish order found by Romuald in 1037, in the desolate waste of Campo Malduli in the Apennines. Their rule was that of St. Benedict.

140. **Pearching Friars.**—Dominicans found by St Dominic and recognised under this name by Pope Innocent III. in 1216.

149. **To The breathless fellow, etc.**—This word-picture, down to line 162, should be compared with those in lines 31-39, and 347-377.

172. **Funked.**—Stifled in smoke.

189. **Giotto 1276-1335.**—Angiolotto di Bondone, the friend of Dante, was the first of the great line of Florentine painters. With him the traditions of decadent classicism and Byzantine formalism are completely broken.

196. **She's just my niece ..Herodias.**—Fra Lippo's frescoes at Prato are on the subjects of John the Baptist and St. Stephen. Among those on the Baptist is one representing the Feast of Herod, in which Salome offers the Saint's head to Herodias; there is a traditional belief that the Herodias of the picture is



painted from Lucrezia Buti, the nun who escaped from the convent to marry the friar.

235. **Brother Angelico.** 1387-1455—His frescoes in San Marco in Florence establish his claim in the National Gallery.

236. **Brother Lorenzo**—Usually called Monaco, the Monk. He was a comparatively early Sienese painter, who entered the Camaldolese order in Florence. His fame spread and he executed commissions in Rome and other parts of Italy.

276. **His name is Guidi**—Tommaso Guidi or Masaccio, 1401-1429, was supposed by Browning to be the pupil of Lippo. The relation was in fact exactly the reverse. His chief works are the frescoes still in the Brancacci Chapel, in the Carmine Monastery at Florence,

324. **Prato**—A small provincial town, 12 miles west of Florence, where Fra Lippo painted the frescoes which are accounted his masterpieces. See note, line 196.

828. **Turn the Deacon off his toasted side**—The legend of St. Laurence relates how being burned upon a gridiron, he asked to be turned, "being done on one side."

The frescoes at Prato are not of St. Laurence, but of St. Stephen the Baptist and St. Bernard.

339. **Chianti Wine**—A famous red wine of Tuscany.

346. **In Sant' Ambrogio's**—Fra Lippo painted an altar-piece for the nuns of Sant' Ambrogio in 1441.

347. **I shall paint God in the midst** etc.—What follows as far as line 377 is a description of the Coronation of the Virgin as it may still be seen in the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence.

354. **Saint John. The Baptist**—Children born in Florence are baptised in the church of St John.

355. **Saint Ambrose**—Archbishop of Milan, 340-397.

377. **Iste perfecit opus**—In the painting Fra Lippo's picture of himself is at lower right-hand corner. In his hand is scroll on which is inscribed this Latin phrase, meaning, "It was he who did this work".

Most of Browning's information for this poem came from the highly coloured life of the painter (d. 1469) which Browning read in Vasari's *Le Vite Pittori* ('Lives of the Painters'). At one point this lively and humorous dramatic sketch develops into a



serious discussion of the purpose of art. The full significance of the poem can be realized only comparing it in all aspects with 'Andrea del Sarto.'

*l.* 7. **Carmine**—The monastery of Carmelite friars.

*l.* 17. **Cosimo de Medici**—Ruler of Florence and patron of the arts; Cf. line 29.

*l.* 25. **Judas**—Judas Iscariot; Cf. Mark xiv.

*l.* 47, **Mew**—Any place of confinement ; originally a cage for hawks at moulting time.

*l.* 67. **St. Laurne**—The church of San Lorenzo in Florence.

*l.* 139. **Camaldolese**—A religious order at Camaldoli near Florence.

*l.* 140. **Preaching Friars**—Dominicans.

*l.* 176. The tradition of religious painting had been spiritual and unrealistic; cf. Giotto (II 89) and Fra (Brother) Angelico (line 235).

*l.* 196. **Herodias**—The mother of the dancer Salome, who pleased Herod so much that he promised her whatever she wanted. It was she, not Herodias, who asked for the head of John the Baptist, Cf. Mark vi, 17-28.

*l.* 236. **Brother Lorenzo**—A great painter of the Camaldolese Order (1370-1425).

*l.* 276. **Guido**—Toscanaccio (1401-29). Not the pupil, but the master of Fra Lippo Lippi, II. 295-6. Cf. 'How it Strikes a Contemporary'.

*l.* 323 ff. Many frescoes by Lippi are to be seen at Prato near Florence, but none on St. Laurence, who was burned to death on a gridiron. The story is that, being roasted on one side, he asked to be turned (line 328).

*l.* 339. **Chianti**—A wine from Tuscany, S. of Florence.

*l.* 346. **Sant' ambrogio**—Lippi painted on altar-piece for the nuns of St. Ambrose.

*l.* 351. **orris**—A kind of iris, the rhizome of which was grated for the preparation of perfumes.

*l.* 354. The children of Florence were baptized in the church of St. John (the Baptist).

*l.* 355. **St. Ambrose** was Archbishop of Milan (A.D. 340-97).



ll. 357-8. Job was famous for his patience in tribulation he lived in the land of Uz.

l. 377. *Iste perfecit opus*—‘he performed this work’ In the altar-piece (line 346) there is a figure of Lippi himself to whom an angel hands a scroll bearing these words.

l. 387. Her face might for a painting of St. Lucy.

## 24. CLEON

The visionary scene of his first meeting with Karshish, though altogether Browningsque in detail, is Wordsworthian in its mysterious effect upon personality—

“I crossed a ridge of short, sharp, broken hills  
Like an old lion’s cheek teeth. Out there came  
A moon made like a face with certain sports  
Multiform, manifold and menacking :  
Then a win rose behind me.”

A less formidable problem is handled in the companion study of Cleon. The Greek mind fascinated Browning, though most of his renderings of it have the savour of a salt not gathered in Attica, and his choice of types shows a strong personal bias. From the heroic and majestic elder art of Greece he turns with pronounced preference to Euripides the human and the positive, with his facile and versatile intellect, his agile criticism, and his “warm tears”. It is somewhat along these lines that he has conceived his Greek poet of the days of Karshish, confronted, like the Arab doctor, with the “new thing”. As Karshish is at heart a spiritual idealist, for all his preoccupation with drugs and stones so Cleon, a past-master of poetry and painting, is among the most positive and worldly-wise of men. He looks back over a life scored with literary triumphs, as Karshish over his crumbs of learning gathered at the cost of blows and obloquy. But while Karshish has the true scholar’s dispassionate and self-effacing thirst for knowledge. Cleon measures his achievements with the insight of an epicurean artist. He gathers in luxuriously the incense of universal applause, his epos inscribed on golden plates, his songs rising from every fishing-bark at night-fall,—and wistfully contrasts the vast range of delights which as an artist he imagines, with the limited pleasures which as a man he enjoys. The magnificent symmetry, the rounded completeness of his life, suffer a serious deduction, here, and his Greek



sense of harmony suffers as well as his human hunger for joy. He is a thorough realist, and finds no satisfaction in contemplating what he may not possess. Art itself suffers disparagement, as heightening this vain capacity of contemplation :—

“I know the joy of kingship : well, thou art king !”

With great inenuity this Greek realism is made the stepping-stone to a conception of immortality as un-Greek as that of the Incarnation is un-Semitic. Karshish Sharank intuitively from a conception which fascinated while it awed ; to Cleon a future state in which joy and capability will be brought again to equality seems a most plausible supposition, which he only rejects with a sigh for lack of outer evidence :—

“Zeus has not yet revealed it ; and alas,  
He must have done so, were it possible !”

The little Vignette in the opening lines finely symbolises the brilliant Greek decadence, as does the closing picture in Karshish the mystic dawn of the Earth. Here the portico, flooded with the glory of a sun about to set, profusely heaped with treasures of art ; there the naked uplands of Palestine, and the moon rising over jagged hills in a wind-swept sky.

This is one of the most accomplished of Browning's monologues, and complementary by contrast, to ‘Karshish’ ; in both, the most significant revelation is in the postscript. The characters are fictitious. Cleon represents the acme of Greek thought and culture ; he has nothing more to achieve in this life and is tormented with the thought of annihilation at death. He has treasures on earth but none in heaven. So assured is he of the supremacy of Greek philosophy that he refuses contemptuously to discover anything for himself of Paul and his sect. Yet this ‘mere barbarian ironically enough, had taken pains to study Greek thought in his quest for truth, as Browning point out in the quotation appended to the title. This is taken from Paul's address to the Athenians (Acts xvii. 28-9 : ‘for in him we live, and move, and have our being as certain also of your poets have said, for we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not then to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. ‘Browning's poem provides a striking postscript to Matthew Arnold's ‘Empedocles on Etna’.



Dowden describes the poem as 'an Ecclesiastes of pagan religion.' The colour and opulence of Cleon's surroundings form an ironical contrast to the barrenness of his spiritual outlook ; in 'Karshish' we have the reverse. See p. xx.

*l.* 1. **Sprinkled isles**—This is the meaning of the name given to scattered islands in the Aegean Sea—the 'Sporades'.

*l.* 36. **the Vulgar**—The common people, Cleon is a snob.

*l.* 140. **Terpanper**—A poet and musician of Lesbos.

*l.* 141. **Phidias**—The greatest of Athenian sculptors. Statues were often painted.

*l.* 296. Cf. *ll.* 135-7.







## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS







## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Q. 1.** Reproduce briefly the description of the ancient city now in ruins and all its past glories, as in the poem, *Love among the Ruins*.

**Ans.** In a part of the vast stretches of pasture-land of the Roman Campagna there stood in the remote past a magnificent city. It was the capital of a mighty kingdom whose mighty kings had sway over large territories. Its rulers had held court there they called their councils to determine policies of peace or war with neighbouring kingdoms. In the centre of that great city stood the royal palace with a round circular top from which rose spires, dazzling and glittering in the sun. The city was surrounded by a broad marble wall on which twelve armed soldiers could easily ride abreast; the wall had a hundred broad gates. The city had a large population, living their lives with the usual joys and sorrows of mankind setting their hearts after glory, and afraid of incurring. Like other people of other great cities they too considered it creditable to amass gold and felt it humiliating to have to part with gold. There was a high-towered building in the city; a lofty turret rose from it, and surrounding it was a circular race-course along which the chariots of competitors sped forth in all their glory. From the turret, the king and his mistresses and his courtiers watched the sports. Occasionally, from the same turret he looked upon the whole city far and wide. He was distant hills topped with temples, rows of monumental pillars ( or pillar-like trees ) in the open spaces of the wood, causeways, aqueducts, bridges, etc. all around. Most of all, he was pleased to view the large, busy population, the main object of his pride. The nation that owned the city, was not only rich and prosperous but also highly ambitious. It sent out large numbers of soldiers north and south to conquer new territories; and when the soldiers returned victorious, the nation build a brazen pillar in honour of their gods. It was so rich that it always kept in reserve a large number of chariots and enough soldiers to man them; it had plenty of gold to equip these war chariots and fighters.



**Q. 2.** "Browning remains one of the most difficult poets to assess." Suggest and examine possible grounds for such an opinion.

**Ans.** There are three Brownings : Brownings the passionate singer of love and youth; Browning the curious investigator of the devious by-ways of human experience ; and Browning the intrepid fighter and valiant believer in the imperishable greatness of the human soul. Each has attracted its little coterie of admirers—and, in his own day at any rate, the last aspect of Browning proved arresting. Neglected at first, on account of his alleged obscurity and grotesque style, he was later admired as the greatest moral and spiritual force in English poetry. He is supposed to be the voice of romanticism in its most realistic aspect reconciling religion with science, passion with puritanism, the most ardent and soaring aspirations of the human heart with the hardest realities of life. A robust optimism, a vigorous zest in life, a keen relish of the actual realities of life with all their roughness and crudity, warm and colour almost every line he wrote. But perhaps Browning has suffered by the over-insistence many critics on the ethical and religious aspects of his work, not that it is negligible, but it has not the tremendous importance arrogated to it by a number of his admirers who regard his work as a series of texts for reverent exegesis. Of the three Brownings as revealed in his poetry, the first is not merely of the greatest artistic value but of the greatest human value. The other sides of him are interesting in a subsidiary sense. There are critics, however, who would emphatically assert the later aspect of his genius above everything else and reverse the order.

Who is greater? Browning the singer of love and life, or Browning the prophet of man's spiritual destiny ? the question has long been under heated debate and we are no nearer solution than we were fifty years ago.

We face greater difficulty when we try to assess Browning the psychologist. As the psychological critic of the complexities of experience, let it be frankly conceded that there he has not chosen the best means of expression. He is justly blamed for his obscurity. To some extent this obscurity results from his subject. He often tries to make language imply what it cannot say and not all readers are capable of following his thoughts. His words



can inspire only those who have ascended similar pinnacles. But, Browning's obscurity does not always come from his subject. Sometimes it comes from his impatience or from his failure to see the reader's difficulty in following him. Either he will not stop to help the reader or he cannot imagine that the reader can be having any trouble. He leaves things to be guessed, and even learned professors cannot guess them or guess them differently. He hurries through a sentence tangled with ambiguous constructions and leaves the reader struggling helplessly. At other times he goes darting off in his marvellous enthusiasm into such rapid and bewildering excursions into psychological labyrinths that it is impossible to follow. The reader has so many chances to get the wrong idea that he is apt to miss the right one. More often than not, there is in his poetry, a riot of learning and incidental thoughts.

Hugh Walker has rightly said that there is no nineteenth-century poet of the first rank whose ultimate position in the hierarchy is so doubtful as Browning's. He is at once astonishingly faulty. On the one hand, in his finest pieces, such a *Love among the Ruins*, he sweeps the reader away with him as Tennyson rarely does. On the other hand, for every sin against art which spoils the pages of Tennyson, a hundred blot those of Browning's, and his very originality often leads him to those irritating eccentricities which have proved the despair of his readers. His style and rhythm are often intolerably rough and unmusical. He is often full of strained expressions, irritating puns, and harsh inversions. Besides, he often gives expression to many thoughts when a few would suffice; the total effect might be produced in less space than he takes.

But this only a partial picture of the poet who with all his faults reigns supreme in his own field. We shall find a more graceful and delicate music in Tennyson, a more voluptuous intensity in Rossetti, and an easier sweep in Byron, a more ideal beauty in Shelley, but no one poet there is so complete a fusion of all these qualities as in Browning.

Let us return to our earlier postulate. There are, as we have already said, three Brownings—Browning the singer of love and youth, Browning the prophet of man's spiritual destiny, and Browning the plain psychologist. With certain people his first aspect has the greatest appeal, with some it is the second and



there are others who find him greatest in the field of psycho-analysis. But in his greatest poems, Browning the singer, the thinker and the fighter join hands. We touch each side of him each of his three personalities.

To many Browning remains a puzzle, an enigma. But to those who have learnt to love him, his poetry is a great force for sanctifying and strengthening the soul.

**Q. 3. Write a short essay on Browning as the poet of 'Men and Women'.**

**Ans.** There are three Brownings : Browning the passionate singer of love and life. Browning the curious investigator of the devious by-way of human experience, and Browning the intrepid fighter and valiant believer in the imperishable greatness of the human soul. In *Men and Women*, all these three aspects of his genius have found full expression. Let us take them one by one and see how it stands.

As a poet of love, Browning reigns supreme. We shall find a more delicate grace in Tennyson, a more voluptuous intensity in Rossetti, and easier sweep in Byron, a more ideal beauty in Shelley, but in no one poet is there a more complete fusion of all these qualities than in Browning. The mystic side of passion is suggested tenderly and wistfully in *Evelyn Hope* and *Two in the Compagna*. In both, love is an ideal as well as a present actuality and being an ideal its satisfaction is ever incomplete—'infinite passion and the pain of finite hearts that yearn'—hence the divine restlessness of the human heart. Certain aspect of love have been more finely rendered by other poets, but in range of matter Browning has no superior. In *The Last Ride Together*, *Love among the Ruins*, *One word More* and many other poems the outlook of the poet is the outlook of man who puts love in front of any other thing in life, as a force for sanctifying the soul. *Love among the Ruins* ends with the triumphant note :

For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin,  
Shut them in,  
With their triumphs and glories and the rest,  
Love is best !

*The Last Ride Together* is considered by many critics to be the noblest of Browning's love-poems. It is a poem of unrequited love in which the force of the hour, the value of the quintessen-



tial moments as factors in the development of the human soul, have been set forth with such startling power. The elusiveness of love is more fancifully dealt with in *Love in a Life and Life in a Love*. The lover is always seeking the loved one throughout the rooms of the house, never finding her, yet the pursuit itself gives a meaning and purpose to life. Love is so compelling, so transforming that no quarrel can withstand it ! That is the burden of *A Lover's Quarrel*. Some have been surprised that Browning whose own love-story was so complete and satisfying should dwell in his poetry so often on thwarted and imperfect love. Surely it was the consciousness of the dynamic splendour of love on life and character that gave him the keen perception of what is lost by losing or trifling with love. And motto for his love-poetry might be found in the beautiful lines from *By the Fire-side* :

‘Oh, the little more and how much it is !  
And the little less and what worlds away !’

As the psychological critic of the complexities of experience, Browning stands unparalleled in the whole realm of English literature. He lets his keenly analytical mind play over it, and we get the ‘inside’ of the subject. It is impossible in this brief retrospect to deal adequately with the great wealth of Browning’s pictures of human nature ; but we may briefly take note of a few poems in which his analytical powers are employed to the fullest extent. In each of the full-length studies of artists, such as Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto he gives us the very soul of his subject. In art, as elsewhere, Browning is jealous of the individual, and the art is judged for its reaction on the character of the artist as well as for its expression of his nature. Lippo needed life and experience to give fulness to his work ; Andrea, some reciprocal impulse of love. *Karshish the Arab Physician* gives evidence of Browning’s remarkable psychological powers. It is a subtle representation of a soul conceived with absolute spiritual standers. While obliged to live in a world all standards are relative and determined by the circumstances and limitations of its situation.

Lastly, we have Browning the prophet and preacher. It is curious to note that Browning is always a poet of the soaring aspirations of the human heart even when he deals with petty and sordid things. Rich and robust optimistic colours and



warms almost every line that he wrote. This unique he is believed to have achieved through his philosophy which postulates the existence of God and of the human soul privileged to win a divine destiny through continued effort to transcend the limitations of earthly life. The bliss of endeavour, the infinite worth of the consciousness of failure, with its evidence of coming triumph, 'the spark that disturbs our clod', these are the essence of his optimistic interpretation of human life. And he prolongs the battle beyond time, for the struggle upward may, indeed end with death :

'What is Time ? leave Now for dogs and apes !  
Man has Forever.'

—A Grammarian's Funeral.

It is this conviction that gives value to his view of spiritual progress, as reaching beyond death to a higher stage of being, for which man's attainments in this life are only preliminary. There are 'other adventures brave and new' for man, more lives yet,, other ways of warfare, other depths of goodness and heights of earthly existence.

It is a peculiarity with Browning that all his writings are experimental studies in spiritual progress : Whether he deals with love or patriotism or intellectual ambition or artistic passion or religious aspiration, it is all brought to one common denominator its effect upon a man's soul. Browning sees living in all its manifestations as a seeking after God. For him, therefore, all moral experience is by its very nature a striving of the individual to put himself into right relationship with God, and he as a poet, a historian of the soul's journeyings, must seize the crucial turning points peculiar to each man's pilgrimage. And for this especial task he chose the 'dramatic monologue' as the art-form for the expression of his genius.

Men and Women gives us a galaxy of pictures of human nature and shows Browning at once as an observer and critic of life. The poems contained in this volume are psychological, pictorial, analytical, dramatic, and lyrical. But the human not is above everything. It is only natural in the work of a poet whose creed was.

'Mine be man's thoughts, loves, hates.'



**Q. 4.** With specific reference to the poems on art and artists in *Men and Women* write essay on Browning's view of art and its place in life in relation to love and religion.

**Ans.** Browning the poet of love and life is also the poet of the Renaissance and its glories, and the critical interpreter of Greek life and thought. Wonderful poems like *Andrea del Sarto* and *Fra Lippo Lippi* reveal Browning's profound interest in art and artists. And it is curious to note that he gives us a well worked out philosophy of life expressed in terms of art. Let us examine some of his great poems on art and see how it stands.

We should do well to begin with old pictures in Florence. Here we are struck with the surprising fact that Browning's sympathies with Greek art are limited. The Greek succeeded, he thought, up to a point splendidly. But the success was limited because it was so perfect. What is perfect dies. The painters of the Renaissance aspired beyond painting man as he is, though in their technique they they lacked the perfections and harmony of Greek art, they were greater because of their very imperfection and crudeness.

The point is arguable ; but this is not the place to discuss it. It is Browning's view, and presented with great charm in *Andrea del Sarto*. Art is no abstraction, thin, arid and theoretic. It must be warmed by life ; that is the burden of *Fra Lippo Lippi*. Clearly, there is no art for art's sake with Browning but for life's sake ; and in art as elsewhere, love and self-surrender are essentials for success.

*Fra Lippo Lippi's* art was too realistic and voluptuous. The Church told him that his business was to paint men's souls and 'forget there was such a thing as flesh.

'Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms !'  
The painter asks if this was sense :  
'A fine way to paint soul, by painting body  
And can't fare worse !'

He maintains that if we get beauty we the best thing God invents. He knows he is a beast, but he can appreciate the wonder and the power in the shapes of things which God has made to make us thankful for them. They are not to be passed over and despised, but dwelt upon and wondered at.



‘The world is not blot for us, nor blank,  
It means intensely and means good,  
‘Ah, but your art does not make people pray,, lays the  
Prior.

‘But a skull and cross-bones are sufficient for that ; you don’t need art at all,’ is the quick rejoinder

In each of his full-length studies of artist, he has made, Browning hints at something lacking. Pictor Ignotus needed human affection. Lippo Ignotus needed human affection, Lippo needed life and experience to give fulness to his work, Andrea need some great impulse of a powerful emotion. In art as everywhere else Browning is jealous of the individual ; and the art is judged for its reaction on the artist as well as for its expression of his nature. Honourable failure Browning treats lightly. Life is meant for venture. We must dare the open seas, not hug the land. The great thing is aspiration. And aspiration is fed by love. Andrea del Sarto misses love in life and so his art becomes soulless. He could do easily and perfectly what in the bottom of his heart he wished for, deep as that might be ; only if Lucrezia urged him inspired him to claim a seat by Raphael and Michael Angelo he might for her sake have done it. But Raphael and Michael Angelo had glimpses of the glory of heaven which were denied to Andrea because he lacked love in his life. Lucrezia stifles his soul and kills his art and kills his art and ‘all is placid, silver-grey’ for him. He lacks the rapture, the ecstasy of the great painters that transmutes thir art to a level of ethereal beauty. Only occasionally his art leaves the common ground ; he had a chain which dragged him down. The fire of aspiration had died down in him, and this is the worst that can happen to man :

‘Man’s reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what is a heaven for ?’

The same idea is brought out with wonderful vividness and charm in the *Old Pictures in Florence*. Greek art taught us perfection of the body, but the artists of the Renaissance one day woke to the perfection of soul, and then they worked for eternity, as the Greeks for time. The art of the Greeks was perfect ; the bodies they painted could be no more beautiful. Consequently, there was an arrest of progress ; they could never change being whole and complete. Having learned all they have



to teach, we shall see their work abolished. But in painting Renaissance painters had no doubt to meet the objection, 'what more do you want than Greek art? They answered. 'To paint man—to make his new hopes shine through his flesh. 'To bring the invisible full into daylight, what matters if the visible go to the dong'? How much they dared, these Renaissance Painters! The first of this new development in art, however imperfect, beats the best the old!

No consideration of Browning's psychology of art can neglect the poems relating to music. They are not so obviously attractive as those on painting, but in several cases are more subtle and convincing. Browning himself was a musician, and had therefore the advantage of thoroughly understanding the technique of the art, as well as valuing its emotional content. Music more than painting appeals to the emotions. It is the most potent, direct, and popular of all the arts.

To take two of the most important: Master Hugues of Saxe Gotha and Abt Vegler. In the first, dealing with a fugue, life itself is criticised from the standpoint of the fugue. The fugue is a kind of music, constructed on logical lines; the various parts are elaborated from a simple theme, where they answer one another. The layman, however, it seems to be a confusion of sounds with a definite theme running through.

Now, what relation has the fugue to life? What does it answer? Well, take it as a symbol of life

The simple, elemental start, the growing variations, the clashing implications, the bewildering convulsions, and the finis-death. It suggests life has no meaning. Give us then less technical cleverness, more passion, says the poet, read some meaning into life. Life is no mere game of calisthenics.

*Abt Vogler* is a great work. It is Browning's fullest exposition of music in its relation to life. The musician in the poem is carried away by his ecstasy; can he not bring down heaven to earth, and suffuse the soul with the glow of high ideals. In the spell of music the spirit ceases to be bound to a particular environment; it is lost in the universal.

But the music dies away; so too its momentary thrill. Everything is for a moment, then fades. But does it fade? No, nothing good really passes away; it leaves behind it the message



of what might and will be. The music made by our lives is never wasted. The thinker despairs, but the musician knows that even discords are wanted to make full harmony :

‘Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear  
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the woe and  
wail’.

So let us get back from the heights of emotion to sober commonsense, the experience blended with warm confidence in the future ‘the C Major of this life’.

**Q. 5.** “The ‘dramatic monologue’ is a contradiction in terms”. Show how far Browning succeeds in resolving this contradiction.

**Ans.** Browning had in him two opposite tendencies ; he was both a poet and a thinker. His creed was that of a poet, but his governing motif was that of a thinker. Of Emerson’s lectures it was said that they were not so much speech as thought made audible ; and of Browning’s poetry you might say that it is not so much verse as the thought and passion of poet embodied and vitally conveyed. Drama is essentially a literature of action ; monologue is a literature of thought. It was Browning’s peculiar genius that he combined the two elements of thought and action which usually run counter to each other.

Nearly all his writing is from a dramatic standpoint. Even his lyrics are so many dramatic utterances. The poet takes his stand inside the personality and experience of some person, imaginary or historic, and he speaks for him or makes him speak. But it is not merely ‘speech’ you have, nor is the scene outside. It is not soliloquy you have ; it is a kind of intense debate, a kind of drama played through a single soul. It is not simply the ‘person’ the poet gives you animated and kept alive in spiritual action so that he may reveal himself through and in his utterance. There is also a peculiar thoughtfulness and curiosity, searching and explaining rising from facts to their meaning, and from phenomena to their sources. The poems are not dramatic lyrics, they are also dramatic studies. In other words, his dramatic poems are not only dramatic studies of spiritual quality and depth nor only studies of complex situations and characters, but the dramatic and argumentative threads are often so worked together that it is at times impossible to keep them clear.



Browning's strength lay in the successful fusion of the dramatic and the lyrical elements. In a short poem he does what a novelist will take six hundred pages to do. He creates a situation and a personality and so fuses them together that we can forget neither. The situations and moments of life and character chosen are pregnant and complex, and the passion and thought of years is compressed in a few lines. The poet throws himself, with all his intellect, feeling and imagination, into the very mind of some person and penetrates it—dramatically. It is not set forth in any general way ; it is embodied, individualised. The 'person' is before you, not a mere notion or image. He lives and moves, and lets you into the secrets of his life and motives.

And this has been called 'dramatic thinking', or 'dramatic monologue'. This apparently involves some contradiction. The term monologue would imply as if the poem were only a case of intellectual analysis, i. e. thought itself in terms and combinations of life, or a argument becoming so vivid that it brings together some dramatic force though the work all the same remains intellectual, not vital ; abstract, not concrete. On the other hand, the poems of Browning are alive with the evidence and energy of life, where thought works itself out, not in abstractions, but in terms of character and life. At times there may be a preponderance of intellect in his work, but in most of his poems and certainly in his best, he is poet first and thinker second, and the body of thought is given in an element of passion and imagination, and with a force and fitness of situations that are strongly dramatic.

Thus, Browning not only resolved the contradiction inherent in the term 'dramatic monologue' but made it the art-form best suited to the expression of his genius.

**Q. 6. "Carlyle and Matthew Arnold were of their age, though not wholly, while Browning and Rossetti were escapists." Discuss.**

**Ans.** A distinctive feature of the Victorian era is the stress it lays on the worth of the moral life of man, and both Browning and Carlyle are interested primarily in the moral, ethical and spiritual values of man. And although neither of them developed the organic view of humanity, which it implied in their doctrines, into an explicit philosophy, still the moral life of the indivi-



dual is for each of them the infinite life in the finite. Both are agreed that the universe is moral, its last night is richness, and the task of each man is to convert it into his own motive, and thereby make it the source of his own actions.

But, like most Victorians, Carlyle found himself torn between faith and reason and the reconciliation between the two which he sought to effect was typically Victorian especially in the sphere of duty, with which alone, as a battle between good and evil as a fixed battle in which the forces of duty were laid upon a finite being, and its weight made him break out into a cry of despair—a characteristic feature of the Victorian age.

The characteristics of the Victorian age are faithfully portrayed in the pages of Carlyle. He showed us that the world is ultimately spiritual, but he stood between the individual and the Infinite without hope or guide. In the last analysis Carlyle's words seem like a cry of despair rather than a song of faith. Besides, Carlyle, like most Victorians, was always more able to detect the disease than to suggest the remedy. In spite of his 'Everlasting Yea' life was to 'the sanctuary of sorrow'. In many of his passages there is a far deeper pessimism than in anything that Matthew Arnold or Clough could experience or express. To sum up in a word, Carlyle regarded evil as having penetrated into the innermost recesses of man's being. Thought was disease, morality was blind obedience to a foreign authority, religion was awe of an unknowable with whom one could achieve no kinship. Man was unable to satisfy himself with the things of the senses, and was also 'shut out of the heaven of spirit.' What have been called 'the three terms of thought' have fallen asunder in his teachings. It is the difficulty of reconciling these that brings despair; while optimism is evidently the consciousness of their harmony.

In sharp contrast to the sceptic note of the Victorian age comes the robust optimism of Browning. One of the ruling conceptions of Browning's view of life is that good is absolute, and that it reveals itself in all the events of human life. The governing motive, whether the conscious motive or not, of Browning's poetry, was the necessity of finding in the conflicts and antagonisms of human life the evidence of the presence of this absolute good. Browning's faith is an optimistic faith, a peaceful consciousness of the highest in man, and therefore, in all other things. To him :



'this world is no blot for us  
Nor blank, it means intensely and means good.'

He believes that God permits nothing to break from His universal sway ; even the very wickedness and misery of life are brought into the scheme of good, and, when rightly understood, reveal themselves as its means. Again and again he brings the natural world, the history of man, and the nature of God, within the limits of the same conception. The idea of love as the ultimate reality solved for Browning all the enigmas of human life and thought.

'The thing that seems  
Mere misery under human schemes,  
Becomes regarded by the light  
Of love, as very near, or quite  
As good a gift as joy before'

—Easter Day.

Love plays in Browning's philosophy of life, the part that Reason fills for Hegel, or the Blind will for Schopenhauer ; and he never hesitates to reduce all phenomena into forms of the activity of this first principle. Love gives him not only a firm footing, amid the wash and welter of the present world, where time spins fast, life fleets, and all is change, but it makes him look forward with joy to the 'immortal course', for to him all the universe is love-woven. All life is but treading the 'love-way.'

To many a rationalist critic Browning's triumphant faith in the ultimate goodness of things has seemed mere wishful thinking, and an escape, like Rossetti's into the dream world in the blue distance. To them Carlyle's stern moral philosophy and Matthew Arnold's pensive scepticism seem more akin to the Zeist-Krieg, the Time Spirit, of the Victorian age, and they describe Browning and Rossetti as escapists who sought refuge in an imaginary world of their own. Rossetti was indeed an escapist, but to give Browning the same epithet would hardly be fair. No English poet has spoken more impressively than Browning on the weightier matters of human life, or sought with more earnestness to meet the difficulties which arise when we try to penetrate to its ultimate depths. Beneath the endless variety of his poems there are permanent principles, and although these are expressed by way of emotion, they are held by him with all the resources of his reason. His faith, like Pomelia's, is held fast 'despite the plucking fiend'. He has given to us something more than intuit



tive glimpses into man's soul. Throughout his life he held up the steady light of an optimistic conception of the world, and by its means inrejected new vigour into ethical thought.

In his case, therefore, it is not an irrelevant question, but one almost forced upon us, whether we are to take his philosophical postulates and inspiring optimism as valid truth, or to regard them merely as subjective opinions held by a great and powerful poet. Are they creations of a powerful imagination and nothing more? Not so. There is such deliberate earnestness and systematic consistency in his teaching that Hegel can scarcely be said to have maintained that 'the Rational is the Real' with greater intellectual tenacity than Browning held to his view of life. If his persistent search for good in apparent evil is to be interpreted as excapism, we would have to give the term a different meaning than the insipid connotations with which it is connected at the present time. To Shelley, perhaps the most intensely spiritual of all our poets,

That light whose smile kindles the universe,  
That beauty in which all things work and move,

was an impassioned sentiment, a glorious intoxication; to Browning it was a conviction, reasoned and willed, possessing the whole man, and held in the sober moments when the heart is silent. The greatness of Browning's poetry is in its perceptive grip, in its intellectual depth, and in nothing is he more remarkable than in the manner he takes up this takes and assumes his artistic function.

Browning was no Sir Galahad, blind to all but the Holy Grail. His victory was won not in the placid upper air of poetic imagination, but in the enemy's citadel where sin and sorrow sit throned amidst the chaos. Consequently, his song is heard in the dark, and it cheers the way farer on the muddy highway, along which burthened humanity meanly toils. His optimism is more earnest and real than any pious hope dogmatic belief, or benevolent theory held by a placid philosopher. No lover of Browning's poetry can miss the vigorous manliness of the poet's own bearing or fail to recognize the strength that flows from his joyous, fearless personality.

Browning, in fact, was the very reverse of an excapist. He saw life in terms of an endless and perpetual conflict which transcends even death to the 'life after life in unlimited series.'



‘Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what’s a heaven for ?’

**Q. 7. Discuss the extent of Browning’s success in making an amalgam of psychological analysis and imaginative portraiture.**

**Ans.** It is a peculiarity with Browning that nearly all his writings are experimental studies in spiritual experience : whether he deals with love or patriotism or intellectual ambition or artistic passion or religious aspiration, it is all brought to one common denominator—its effect upon character, its value in the making of the soul. Much of his work is in the nature of psychological studies, but it is much more than merely psychological analysis of a character in a given situation. It is also instinct with artistic and imaginative beauty. In most of his poems, and certainly in his best, we find a wonderful synthesis of psychological analysis and imaginative portraiture.

This is nowhere better illustrated than in his ‘dramatic monologues’, such as the ‘My Last Duchess’. The strength of the poem lies as much in the penetrating analysis of the heartless Duke’s character as in the imaginative portraiture of the whole situation. Here in a short poem Browning has done what a novelist would take a long novel to do. He has created a personality and a situation and so fused them together that we can forget neither. A stern, severe, Italian nobleman with a ‘nine hundred years name’, is showing his picture gallery to the envoy of a Count, whose daughter he is about to marry. He is standing before the portrait of his last duchess, for he is a widower, and is telling his companion that ‘the depth and passion of her earnest glance’ was not reserved for her husband alone, but the slightest courtesy or attention was sufficient to call up ‘that spot of joy’ into her face. She smiled on her husband, but she also smiled on others (on everyone, in fact), and this the selfish duke could not brook. So he ‘gave commands’ and then ‘all smiles stopped together.’ The concentrated tragedy of this line is a good example of the poet’s power of comprising a whole life-story into two or three words.

‘The Bishop orders his Tomb’ is another fine example of Browning’s unique ability in combining acute psychoanalysis with a highly dramatic situation. In a few telling sentences, he lays bare the soul of the worldly Bishop who is not at all anxious to



leave a life which he has found very satisfactory for a future state about which he has neither anxiety nor concern. What he is concerned with is his tomb. His old rival Gandolf has deprived him of the position in the Church which he longed for as a last resting place, but he hopes to make up for the loss by a more tasteful and costly monument, and with a more classical inscription than his. That the poem gives us a true *character-analysis* of the worldly minded Bishop is quite clear. But it also gives us something more ; it gives us *a clear sense of the scene*—of the Renaissance age which, though it did good service to humanity in a thousand ways—was much more concerned with flesh than with spirit. And this great truth Browning brings out by combining his psycho-analysis with his wonderful imaginative sweep.

A poem that beautifully illustrates the point under discussion is *Fra Lippo Lippi*. The whole poem is an *acute analysis* of the dissolute artist who had no taste for the religious life. But is it only this much ? Clearly, it is something more *a whole drama covering a life-time*, is compressed in a small poem. The poem opens on a dramatic note : Brother Lippo the painter has been mewed up in the Palace painting saints for his patron—s vocation for which he has no taste. Unable longer to tolerate the restraint, he has tied his sheets and counterpane together and let himself out of the window for a night's frolic with the girls whom he heard singing and skipping in the street below. He has been arrested by the watchmen of the city, who noticed his monastic grab, and did not consider it in accord with his present occupation. He is making his defence and bribing them to let him go and it is exactly at this crucial point that the poem opens. What would have been a cut and dry analysis of a medieval painter's mind in the hands of a less imaginative artist, becomes a living, throbbing drama of human life under the pen of Browning.

'Karshish the Arab Physician' is perhaps one of the best examples of combining cold *psycho-analysis* with highpitched *imaginative fervour*. The half-scoffing earnest, and wholly bewildered state of this Oriental scientist's *mind* is clearly indicated between the lines of his letter to his old master, and side by side with this goes the *dramatic and spectacular element*. His description of Lazarus, whom he meets by chance, and of the state of mind of one who having seen the glories of the



other world, must live again in the midst of the jumble of trivial and insignificant things which constitute our lives, forms one of the most *original and imaginative* pieces in literature.

It was the peculiar genius of Browning to combine his cold analytical power with a bold and picturesque imagination a miracle which few poets, Snakespeare apart, have succeeded in achieving.

**Q. 8. Was Browning's genius fundamentally dramatic and was the dramatic monologue art-form best suited for his genius ?**

**Ans.** Two great interests have been given to modern literature by the growth of modern life and knowledge—nature and man. Browning took man as his part of 'nature's infinite book of secrecy' and this bent and interest has been singularly clear and strong in his mind from the very beginning of his work. In the Preface to *Sordello* he says, "The stress on the poem lay in the *incidents in the development of the soul* : little else is worth study." These words give the aim and theme of all his work. There is growth of knowledge, power and means in his later work, but the underlying interest is essentially the same. From the first he had aimed at the spiritual study and expression of man through the medium of his art.

But if the poet's subject has remained essentially the same, what about the method and form of his work ? There has been change and development in his choice of form and method. Reviewing his career as an artist, and the forms he has used, let us see how this stands. He began with monologue in *Pauline*, then sub-dramatic poetry in *Paracelsus*, then the epic of a soul in *Sordello* where the poet himself speaks. He then made drama ; after that he put forth a little book of "dramatic pieces", that is, poems 'Lyrical in form but dramatic in principle'. Then came three more dramas, and next another little book of poems, lyrical and dramatic. In 1846 he returned to drama and gave *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy*. Now, the question being, which of these works is most adequate to the poet's genius and his subjects ? There can be no doubt as to the answer—the dramatic lyrics are most vivid and sufficient. And the poet thought so himself clearly after 1846 this is the form he uses.



Right from the beginning of his career as a poet, Browning's bent was towards dramatic conception and statement. Even in *Sordello* where the form is least dramatic, this tendency comes out clearly. Besides, Browning made so many plays that it is clear he had a liking for the drama, and it is often argued that he gave up drama and contented himself with dramatic lyrics because circumstances were unfavourable. But it was not circumstances that discouraged him in writing dramas, but the consciousness of his own powers that led to the discovery and adoption of a better form. Drama proper did not give the scope or the expression he required, and so another form came into use, giving the scope and allowing the utterance he sought. All his best work is in that form.

The new form is not a device used once by Browning and abandoned ; it is rather his habitual method, and that in which he best succeeds. It is in essence the method of his greatest works after he abandoned the drama.

There can be no doubt that Browning's genius was fundamentally dramatic, but he possessed only some of the elements of dramatic genius. There is in his dramas, it is true, much admirable work. Nowhere out of Shakesphere, and rarely even in Shakesphere, can there be found a scene more intensely dramatic than the tremendous incident of *Ottima* in *Pippa Passes*. The murder of Duncan is not more terrific or more vivid. *A Soul's Tragedy* is a thoroughly dramatic conception, and is equally clear ; and *A Blot in the Scutcheon*, Dickens emphatically declared that no man living and not many dead, would produce such a work. And yet notwithstanding all this, most critics are agreed that Browning is not at his best in his dramas, and that the energy he devoted for over eight years to the writing of plays, would have produced better results if it had been otherwise directed. And it is obvious that the true reasons for the very qualified success of Browning's dramas are to be found in the character of his genius. He undoubtedly possessed some of the elements of dramatic genius, but he did not possess them all. The method of evolving character and dramatic situations by argument had a close affinity with Browning's genius. For him it was the right method, and his first and greatest task as an artist was to discover under what conditions it could be best applied. Just this discovery, more than anything else, finally turned him from the drama. For



while argumentation is right and natural in a 'dramatic monologue' there may easily be too much of it in a play.

A second cause which unfitted Browning for the regular drama lay in his style. Many critics have pointed out that whoever the speaker may be, he speaks in the voice of Browning, and the fact is too obvious to require much discussion.

Another reason for Browning's choice of the 'dramatic monologue' in place of the regular drama, is the fact that though he is profoundly interested in character, he cares little for action as such. And the drama is essentially the literature of action. Browning, on the other hand, prefers to the action as past. In his poems, as in his dramas, little *happens* though much is *said*. Browning does not and cannot use his dramatic power simply as a poet or merely as a dramatist. He is a dramatist of true power, and his poetry is fundamentally dramatic in principle, but behind and about it you have thinker.

It is difficult to settle finally which interest of the poet is the stronger the lyrical or the dramatic? and in some of the poems' such as *Love among Ruins* it is impossible to settle it. But without seeking to determine that question, it is clear that he regards the dramatic monologue as a medium vital, and therefore most valuable for presenting the problems of the soul, and of life-things in which he was primarily and fundamentally interested. In Browning's dramatic lyrics, the soul of the speaker occupies the centre of the stage, and if the essence of all dramatic expression be action and strictly objective statement, his poetry can be regarded neither as drama, nor as really dramatic. But to put the matter in the phrases of the poet's own, not 'action in character' only but also 'character in action' must be held dramatic. And looked at from this point of view, Browning's genius is essentially dramatic and the dramatic monologue the best medium for its expression.

**Q. 9. Illustrate from *Men and Women* Browning's persistent search for good in apparent evil.**

**Ans.** Shelley and Wordsworth are poets of nature; Browning is the poet of the human soul. 'The heavy and weary weight of all this unintelligible world' had almost crushed Shelley; and it was lightened for Wordsworth only when he was far from the haunts of men, and free from the 'dreary intercourse of daily life'. But Browning sang his song of faith and hope right



amidst the wail and woe of man's sin and wretchedness. Shelley turned away from man ; Wordsworth paid him rare visits ; Browning dwelt with him. He was a comrade in the fight, and ever in the van of man's endeavour, bidding him be of good cheer. He was a witness of God in the midmost dark, where meet in deathless struggle the elemental powers of right and wrong. God is present for him not only in the order and beauty of nature, but in the world of will and thought. Beneath the caprice of individual action and lawlessness of social forces, he saw a beneficent purpose which can never fail.

Now, this was a new world for poetry to enter into, a new depth to penetrate with hope, and Browning was the first of modern poets to do so. And what is of greater significance is the fact that his predecessors' cry of despair is turned by Browning into a song of victory. He lifted human life to a plane of robust optimism, and translated its battle into a song. His optimism is not an attempt to justify the whole by neglecting the parts, or to make wrong seem right by reference to a far-off result, in which the steps of the process are forgotten. He stakes his view of life to meet *all facts* ; One fact ultimately irreconcilable with his hypothesis, will, he knows, destroy it. To justify God, he has to justify *all His ways* to man ; if good rules at all, it rules absolutely.

Consequently, there is a defiant and aggressive note in his attitude. Strengthened with an unfaltering faith in the supreme good, this Knight of the Holy Spirit goes forth over all world seeking out wrongs. He has dared to look on the meanest and darkest forms of action and passion, from which we commonly and rightly turn our eyes, and he has brought back for us from this universal survey a conviction of hope. His interest in meanness, vice, malice, cruelty and brutishness was no morbid curiosity. It was to justify his own conviction that he set out on his quest. He was no painter of dirt, he did not portray filth for filth's sake. He crowds his page with criminals because he sees deeper than their crimes. He goes forth in the might of his faith in the power of good, as if he wished once for all to try the resources of evil at their uttermost, and pass upon it a complete and final condemnation. With this view he seeks evil in its own haunts. But we know that with him at our side we can travel safely through the depths of the Inferno for the flames bend back from him.



In his *Men and Women*, as everywhere else, Browning's chief interest lay in the incidents in the development of the soul. It is the sense of an endless onward movement, the outlook towards an immortal course, the life after life in unlimited series, that gives meaning and purpose to the evil side of things. Browning conceives that we are here, on this earth, just to learn one form, the elementary lesson and alphabet of goodness, namely 'the uses of the flesh', and the separation of soul from its instrument has little significance for the poet, for it does not arrest the course of the moral and spiritual development. The spirit pursues its lone way, on 'other adventures brave and new'.

In *Evelyn Hope*, for instance, Browning portrays the fruitless love of a man 'thrice as old' as the girl he loves. The maiden dies before she was old enough to appreciate his love. Did his love run to waste? Where they 'fellow mortals and nought beside'? Not so: God creates the love to reward the love, and the lover will claim his beloved not in the next life along, but, if need be, through lives and worlds many yet to come. He can wait, he will be more worthy of her in the worlds to come. The time will come when the awakened need of love shall be satisfied.

Browning's persistent search for goodness in evil is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the exquisite poem *The Last Ride Together*. It is a poem of unrequited love, in which there is nothing but the noblest resignation, a compliance with the decrees of fate, but with neither a shadow of disloyalty to the ideal nor despair of the result of dismissal. The woman may reject him, she may not love him; but he is not angry with her, nor annoyed that she fails to estimate him as highly as he estimates himself. He has the ideal in his heart, and this deal will sublimate his desires till it transfigures the human in man and make it almost divine. He asks only for one last ride with her. The request is granted; they ride together,—for the last time.

'Who knows but the world may end tonight!' On the way he reflects on his failure. All men strive but few succeed. He contrasts the petty done with the vast undone. Then he consoles himself that there is the life beyond:

'Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?'

Old age is dreaded by the young and the middle aged; none care to think of it. But the speaker in *By the Fireside* dreads it not. He looks forward to his old age, and prophesies how it will



be passed. He will pursue his studies, but deep as he will be in Greek, his soul will have no difficulty in finding its way back to youth, and he will delight to reconstruct the scene in his imagination where he first made all his own the heart of the woman who blessed him with her love and became his wife. The speaker dreads not death; he has a soul-companion from whom not even death can separate him, and with the memory of this moment of irrevocable union he can face the bounds of life undaunted. In this poem, we catch the tones of the heart-strengthening music that defies death. Neither did the poet's courage fail nor vigour wane, as the shades of night gathered around him.

The root of Browning's joy and strength is in the need of progress towards an infinitely higher goal. He rejoices

‘that man is hurled  
From change to change unceasingly  
His soul's wings never furled.’

The bliss of endeavour, the infinite worth of the consciousness of failure, with its evidence of coming triumph, ‘the spark that disturbs our clod’, these are the essence of his optimistic interpretation of human life. And he prolongs the battle beyond time, for the struggle upward may, indeed, end with death. But this only means that man ‘has learned the uses of flesh’, and there are in him other potencies to evolve :

‘Other heights in other lives, God willing !

— One Word More.

It is this conviction that gives value to his view of spiritual progress, this life are only preliminary. There are other adventures brave and new for man, ‘more lives yet’, other ways of warfare, other depths of goodness and heights of love. The poet lifts the moral ideal into infinitude, and removes, all limits of earthly existence.

‘What is time ? Leave Now for dogs and apes  
Man has forever’

So deep is Browning's interest in man as a moral agent that sees nothing else in the world of any great concern. Fra Lippo Lippi would appear to many a miniature Don Juan, powerful enough, under the stress of self-defence, to confuse the distinctions of right and wrong. But the governing motive, the consc-



ious motive or not, of Browning's poetry, the secret impulse that led him to dramatise the conflicts and antagonisms of human life, was the necessity of finding in them evidence of the presence of absolute good. Even Fra Lippo Lippi has an eye to perceive the close affinity between art and religion, and finds this life, with all its limitations good because it reflects and suggests the greater life that is to be. The licentious painter does not fail to observe

'the world  
The beauty and the wonder and power,  
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises'

that lead him back to God, who made it all. He sees a divine order in the scheme of things and exclaims :

'This world is no blot for us  
Nor blank ; it means intensely and means good !

In many of his poems, Browning stipulates that man advances morally 'nch by inch, and he gains nothing except through conflict. No human effort goes to waste, no experience is delusive. Every effort, and every experience has its proper place as a stage in the endless process. The soul bears in it all its conquests ;

'There shall never' be one lost good ! what was shall  
live as before !

In Browning's philosophy of life evil is more apparent than real, the meaning of the universe is moral and the task of each man is to catch up that meaning and make it the source of his actions, the innermost principle of his life. To succeed or fail is as God might ordain ; to strive is all. And it is good that

'Man's reach should exceed his grasp  
What else is a heaven for ?

**Q. 10. Give a critical appreciation of *Love among the Ruins*.**

**Ans.** The poem is one most exquisite love-lyrics of Browning. It is not made complex and metaphysical by the admixture of high spiritual or philosophic thoughts nor made a sermon by close-reasoned argumentation like so many others of his love-poems. More than half the poem is occupied with a series of glaring contrasts between the imagined past glories and triumphs



of a powerful city once in existence there and the desolate, solitary charm of the bare landscape at the present time. The highly imaginative nature painting that the poem presents against the background of an imagined artificial grandeur of human civilization is by itself commendation enough to rank the poem among one of the very best in English literature. It is a noble re-creation of the past; it is as noble a picture of nature's green magnificence obliterating the past. As regards the central theme of the poem, namely, that love is better than all human grandeur and all human efforts after because love is a thing that lasts for ever, while other things decay and disappear, it is brought home by the contrast between the single-minded devotion of the lovers to each other in contrast with "those departed vanities". The thought of the poem bears a close resemblance to the sparkling idea of Thomas Hardy who in the simplest language records his faith that love persists through the ages, in spite of the turmoil of "the breaking of the nations" and is as eternal, indestructible a force as the very law of existence. "*In Love among the Ruins*, one of his sweetest masterpieces, the sight of the old relics and visions of the dead fighters and charioteers do not lay a cold hand upon the lover; but they make his happiness seem the compensation or 'Earth's returns' for those splendid vanities". Besides this thought element, Browning proves here a powerful metrical artist. The cadence is faultlessly harmonious and the rhymes are cleverly managed. The poem affords "Browning's acrobatic skill in queer rhyming" which is here the secret of his great success, though in many other poems it led him into worst grotesqueness.

**Q. 11.** Compare *Love among the Ruins* with *Two in the Campagna* with special reference to the poet's approach to love.

**Ans.** *Love among the Ruins* has a scenic background of vast ruins in the Roman Campagna which the poet actually visited. The main thought of the poem is that "Love is triumphant over Time and Death", and the thoughts of Time and Death are inspired by a view of "the ruins of aqueducts, villas, and tombs", spread over the Campagna. "The Campagna De Roma is that portion of the area in Italy almost coinciding "with the ancient Latium, which lies round the city of Rome.....Anciently it was the seat of numerous cities and is now dotted with ruins in its



whole extent". The awful solemnity of the whole area is almost stupefying to the reflective mind. The ghost of an ancient civilization of past grandeur and human ambition seems to haunt the vast area. "Its vast, almost limitless extent, as it seems to the travellers ; its abundant herbage and floral wreath in early spring : its desolation and crumbling monuments, and its evidences of a vanished civilization, fill the mind with a sweet sadness".

*Love among the Ruins* should be read as a contrast and complement to another love lyric, *Two in the Campagna* written by Browning in 1850 on an earlier visit to the same region. In that poem, his approach to love is quite different from the approach that we find in *Love among the Ruins*. In *Two in the Campagna* the thought was that love between man and woman is finite like all other earthly things. The ruins of the Campagna speak to his mind that everything that man does or possesses is brief and ineffectual. Time and Death are superior to human passions and human generations. Consequently he loses faith in love also. "He would fain lose his separate identity and become wholly absorbed in the beloved, but the finite bounds of our nature cannot be transcended ; we remain separate, the yearning is unfulfilled" (Fowler).

**Q. 12. Write a critical note on Browning's love poems and his conception of Love**

**Ans.** Browning's conception of love has been called "queer." Queer it may be in some of his poems because of his unquestioning faith in an after-life and his bold optimism that is good in this life will find its consummation not here on this earth but in heaven—"or what is heaven for?" Love does not mean to Browning a gross, sensual appetite which feeds passionate desire, as is the case with Byron ; it does not mean the fine frenzy of the Cavalier poets—a fervent desire of the soul for fleshly charms ; not even does it mean to him the exquisite sensuousness of Keats. It does not mean an undefined hankering of the soul after the Platonic ideal as it meant to Shelley. To Browning love meant a spiritual bliss the very treasure of the soul. But it meant much more. The physical fleshly side of love between man and woman, the fire of actual passion—these are not disdained by him ; these are the elements that transfused through the physique into the soul, and contribute to the ether-



eal feeling that elevates the soul into nobler perception. transcending the mere physical. It is a preparation for the life to come.

Browning's love poems are endless in variety, and in these he "breaks away from all tradition. No abandoned romanticist, he well knows, like Johnson and Shakespeare, that 'love is but of manyone apssions.' His grammarian, his rabbi, his saints, stand outside love in the ordinary sense. Yet his own hopes for mankind and muck of his religious faith are heavily staked upon this gospel of love. Were that to prove illusory, that would be left of the 'optimist'?.....Browning seldom betray a doubt the revelation of love; a subject on which he muses with all possible sympathy and curiosity, concerning himself with strange cases and conjectures, and . returning to the notion shat love is not only man's chief happiness but also his chief ordeal" (Elon).

**Q. 13. Write critical notes on the following :—**

- (1) Browning's dramatic lyricism ;
- (2) Metaphysical quality of his poetry ;
- (3) Elements of his philosophy.

**Ans.** Perhaps the most marked characteristic of the poetry of Browning, except the earliest tentative attempts in which the reading public saw only traces of Shelley or attempts after Byron, is its dramatic quality. "Mr. Browning's genius is dramatic," explains Mrs. Orr, "because it expresses itself in the forms of real life, in the supposed experiences of men and women. These men and women are usually in a state of mental disturbance or conflict; indeed they think much more than act" Browning has described the character of his poetic output in the preface to *Pauline*, as "always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many persons, not mine". Again and again, he says that no true poet should, nor does he himself, reveal his own personality in his poetry. In one of his dramatic pieces, he makes Shakespeare say,

"Here's my work : does work discover  
What was rest from work-my life?.....  
Mine remains the unproffered soul."

—At the Mermaid.

His art was to depict chracter "by making speak the very man as he was wont to do", as he says in *Sordello*. And in



this species of dramatic art, Browning is immensely successful because of his strong power of imagination. "He imagines vividly because he observes keenly and feels strongly; and his vividness of his nature puts him to equal sympathy with the real and the ideal—with the seen and the unseen. The one is as living to him as the other." The very names of his successive volumes—"Dramatic Lyrics", "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics," "*Men and Women*," "*Dramatis Personae*," etc., are descriptive of this aspect of his art.

The genius of Browning was not dramatic in the sense that Shakespeare's genius was dramatic. Shakespeare could wholly and unreservedly dissolve himself in the characters of his plays. The personality of Shakespeare cannot be reconstructed from his dramas; that of Browning not only can but also most necessarily, inevitably must, be reconstructed from the utterances of his dramatic characters. The fact that his genius was not that of purely dramatic artist can be seen from the fact of his pure dramatic writings which are more or less failures; he had not the sustained power of evolving a plot by the inter-action of dramatic creator, what he does in his poetry is to seize a man or a woman vividly, imaginatively in some intense situation which induces in the character a highly intense mood. The concrete figure is graphically presented no doubt; but "his wont was," as W. T. Young points out, "to stop short at stage of impulse, intention and thought before they fructify in action..... His is not the drama of the outer world of events, but of the inner world of the soul, where nothing is of importance until it is transfused into a form influencing mind and character." The thoughts and emotions, therefore, in Browning's dramatic characters are exactly those with which he himself was quite at home—which were, so to say, the colour of his own soul, the beacon of his own ideal. This fact necessarily helps us to grasp thoroughly and unmistakably Browning's own ideals, attitude to life and the world—in short, his philosophy (see the next section). lyricist and not a dramatist.

**Metaphysical Quality of his Poetry.** If it is true to say that Shakespeare in his works reveals, if at all, a multiple personality, it is equally true to say that Browning reveals in all his works a single personality. Browning, instinctively a poet, was a philosopher in conscious thought; and except for the fact that as an artist he had the natural faculty of transmuting his philoso-



phy into the sensuous and the sensible by subordinating abstract thinking to life in the concrete, he would have remained an analytical thinker only and no creator of beauty. "Browning, as an artist, is interested first of all in the object which he renders beautiful for its own sake and not for any abstract idea it illustrates...Nevertheless, it may be shown that a theory rules him from behind, and that profound convictions arise in the heart and rush along the blood at the time of his creation."

**Elements of his Philosophy.** This theory or philosophy,—these "profound convictions"—so beautifully and vigorously uttered in his poetry making it a peculiar treasure to all who think in terms of life, may be said to consist in—

(a) **Vigorous Optimism.** It is always true to say that every poet is a philosopher. He must have a clear-cut conception of life and a conviction of its relationship to God and Nature, though very often that philosophy works only in the background of his mind swaying his moods which feed his poetry. While other poets are swayed by 'moods', Browning is swayed by 'ideas'—ideas of morality and religion; these ideas are simply 'convictions' with him. He simply believes in them as true and infallible. It is only in this sense that he can be called a philosopher; his philosophy is a dogma, a creed and not a reasoned system of thought. In his case, these convictions are of a strong optimistic kind. He believes in the infinite capacity of the soul to expand itself to approximate spiritual perfection; he believes in the greatness of man's destiny; he believes in the capacity of love to expand itself to the breadth of the whole moral horizon of the universe; he believes "in the supreme efficacy of goodness, happiness, and justice."

"Truth is in ourselves :

There is an inmost centre in us all,

Where truth abides in fulness".—*Paracelsus*.

(b) **Conception of Evil as Port of Good.** "But no theory", as Young says, 'can have any worth as an optimistic reading of life which does not reconcile its beneficent principle with prevalence of evil, pain and misery.....He (Browning) does not take refuge in the philosophic abstraction that evil is the necessary counterpart of good in thought; he accepts evil as a thing real enough to be an instrument in the hands of love.' Evil, to Browning, is necessary to the realization of life, as a



fore is necessary to the strong man to realize his strength. "Whatever is, is wrong, for the excellent purpose that we may put it right, and in the effort acquire moral power."

"The welcome each rebuff.....  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain  
Learn nor account the pang : dare, never grudge the  
throe."

—*Rabbi Ben Ezra*

Even death is a friendly foe for the fear he makes us conquer in meeting him :

'I was ever a fighter, so ; one fight more.  
The best and the last'.....  
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave".

—*Prospice*

(c) **Conception Of Life Here As Preparation For Hereafter.**  
Life on earth is not perfect, nor need it be perfect. Life is a continuous struggle upward. Evil is a necessary element in this struggle as an incentive to the struggle. Hence is it that failures, disappointments, defeats and even death, rightly understood, have greater significance than real success or achievement. Success or achievement puts a period to activity—it is the negation of life. The soul is greater than what it has achieved ; God is wiser than man in giving him the 'divine discontent'—the irrepressible craving to reach after perfection.

"What's time ! leave Now for dogs and apes !  
Man has For ever"—

—*Gram. Funeral*

"What act proved all its thoughts had been ?

What will but felt the fleshly screed ?"

—*The Last Ride Together*

Success and achievement are nothing. The estimate of man based on his real achievement is but a poor estimate of his soul. The effort, the intention, the ideal struggled for—these mark the soul :

'Not on the vulgar mass  
Called 'work' must sentence pass."

—*Rabbi Ben Ezra*

"Look at the end of work, contrast

The petty Done, the Undone vast,

This present of theirs with the hopeful Past."

—*The Last Ride Together*



God takes into cognizance "all I could never be ; all, men ignored in me". The striving after perfection goes on even after death—perfection is to be achieved in heaven :

"What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more ;

On earth broken arc ; in heaven a perfect round."

*Abt Vogler.*

On earth, therefore, the great sin is the sin of inactivity—inactivity of the moral side in man—"the sin of ungirt loin and in unlit lamp." Stopford Brooke puts the thing in his inimitable language : "The worst failure, the deepest misery on earth are actually good things, the cause of chastened joy. They open to us the larger light. They suggest, and in Browning's belief they prove, that this life is but the threshold of an infinite life, that our true life is beyond."

(d) **Idea Of God Love : Belief In Evolution.** Browning never puzzles over the existence of God and His moral power as controlling and shaping "the manifold energies of the world." "God's in his heaven—All's right with the world." He does not conceive God as a pervading spirit after the pantheistic creed of Wordsworth, nor as a impelling Power whose mysterious "plastic stress sweeps through the dull dense world", as Shelley conceived the Life ; nor was his God the purely personal deity of Anglican Christianity. God, in Browning's conception, is the Creator whose energy is the shaping, impelling power of love. Love is the "philosophic principle" which unifies all things and energises life. The human soul is immortal "Man has forever", to lead himself to the perfecting power of Love.

"God ! Thou art Love ! I built my faith on that."

—*Paracelsus.*

And this moral force is seized by Browning in its evolutionary aspect. Evolution does not appeal to him in its purely scientific, physical aspect. He believes, like Tennyson in God "realizing Himself" but on the moral and spiritual plane :

"Earn the means first—God surely will contrive

Use for our earning.....

Lofty designs must close in like effects"

—*A Grammarian's Funeral.*



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. The Present Author : *A Study in Robert Browning*  
(Bookland, Calcutta)
2. E. Dowden : *Robert Browning*
3. Earnest Rhys : *Browning and his Poetry*
4. Arthur R. Skemp : *Robert Browning*  
(The People's Books)
5. Stopford A. Brooke : *The Poetry of Browning*  
(Pitman)
6. E. Berdoe : *A Primer of Browning*  
(Routledge)
7. J. Flew : *Study in Browning*  
(C. H. Kelly)
8. E. S. Buchanan : *Robert Browning : Optimist*  
(Salmon)
9. S. S. Curry : *Browning and the Dramatic  
Monologue* ((Boston Mass)
10. F. M. Sin : *Robert Browning : Poet and  
Philosopher*  
(Fisher and Unwin)
11. Allen Brockington : *Browning and the 20th Century*
12. John Drinkwater : *Victorian Poetry*
13. B. Miller : *Robert Browning : A Portrait*